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THE VIRGIN MARY
AND THE
TRADITIONS OF PAINTERS.

J. G. CLAY.





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AND THE
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BY THE
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BRITISH CHAPLAIN AT MESSINA.



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INTRODUCTION.

THE Church has power to use whatever means it may judge conducive to the preservation of the faith and the instruction of the people. There are agents and instruments of a secondary kind employed within the Church, which have been useful in promoting the great objects for which the Church was instituted. And those arts and inventions of men, by the help of which Christian knowledge has been propagated and Christian sentiment improved, even though they be not of divine appointment, must be acknowledged as powers in the Church. Various talents are bestowed upon men, with which they may work for the support of religion and for the honour of the sanctuary, in a subordinate department indeed and in a less distinguished manner, but not without effect. All the fine arts have their office in promoting the work of the Church. Poetry, painting, music, and architecture, when they have been directed to Christian purposes by the best skill which the age could command, have done much to adorn the service of God

and to influence the public mind. They who have practised such arts in the Church with a love of truth may be said to have had a mission or ministry in the Church ; and their works form a valuable part of the monuments of the Church, and are entitled to their page in the history of the Church.

Painting was a pagan art. But there was nothing unlawful in that art, nor would a painter have been required to abandon his art on becoming a Christian. The age in which the Gospel was first preached to the world was an age in which the fine arts flourished. It is true that the excellence of the fine arts in those days brought no advantage to Christianity. Art was as yet in the service of paganism ; and it is no wonder that Christian hands were not able to produce works as beautiful as the column of Trajan or the arch of Severus. Christian art could not be created all at once in a time of danger, and raised to an equality with the art of the times. Nevertheless it was reasonable to expect that Christian art would take the place which had been occupied by pagan art whenever the Church should be able to engage the talent of the painter and the architect.

Painting as a Christian art, if indeed the first attempts at expressing Christian ideas by means of fish, birds, leaves, anchors, and other simple devices, can be called art, commenced very soon after Christianity itself. Many examples of monuments of this

kind have been found in the catacombs of Rome. These works were never intended for exhibition, but, such as they were, they were felt to be a satisfaction to the minds of those who caused them to be executed.

If works of a high order of merit were not produced in the Church of the early ages, still there has been scarcely any period of Christianity which has not left examples of the progress which had been made in sacred art. The examples which belong to the earlier ages show imperfection of style certainly, but not corruption of doctrine. If they are not to be admired for the beauty of the execution, they are always interesting as evidences of the religious sentiment of the time, and always valuable for the testimony which they give to the doctrine of time.

Sacred art laboured on through some centuries with the double object of improving itself in the manual part, and of giving a better expression to the sentimental part, of that province which belonged to it. The growth of sacred art from its small beginning is a most interesting subject of study. If improvement in art was slow, the ideas which came from the purest ages were for many centuries kept in view with much faithfulness. Tradition may be preserved and handed on by pictures as safely as by books. Traditions of art and traditions of doctrine were blended together. And picture-doctrine, being

upon the whole jealously guarded from variation and corruption, was placed conspicuously before the eyes of the people, and had no small influence in the Church.

But the best things in this world are liable to abuse. It is instructive to compare the works of one age with those of another, and to test the fidelity of tradition by its conformity with the best and purest standards. Beauty is not the only thing required in a work of sacred art. To reach the highest excellence in painting it is necessary that beauty in the execution should be combined with truth in the representation of fact. These two things are not always found in combination. Art may be rude in touch, but sincere in intention; and then doctrine is honestly, though unskillfully represented. On the other hand, art may produce beautiful works which are not according to truth; and then picture-doctrine becomes deceitful. Faults against the laws of painting mislead the heart of no one; faults against sound doctrine corrupt the faith and mislead the heart. Such divergence of beauty from truth is one of the most important points to be noticed in treating of sacred art.

Italian art in its most glorious days was a powerful auxiliary of the Church of Rome, and the finest works of the period of the Medici were done for the purpose of promoting Romish interests.

But some subjects are more easily handled and more effective in painting than others; and the Italian artist, however willing he might have been to paint for the good of his party, was in some cases restrained by the limited resources of his art. The doctrines which have been taught concerning the Virgin Mary are they which can be most easily expressed and promoted by painting. Of all the subjects which have been handled by the painter, the Virgin Mary is that in which the faithfulness of art to its mission has most especially failed. It is here more than anywhere else that the divergence of modern from ancient art may be seen.

It is the scope of the following pages to show what may be learnt from the works of painters concerning the ideas which have been held with respect to the Virgin Mary by the Christian people in different ages of the Church. The existing monuments fortunately are quite sufficient for the purpose. It will be necessary to commence the inquiry from primitive times; the subject will then lead us through the middle ages; and it will be seen, lastly, what has been the picture-doctrine concerning the Virgin in the Italian schools of the last four or five centuries.

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CHAPTER I.

THE VIRGIN MARY AS AN ORANTE.

ROME is the only place in which by the will of Providence the Church has been able to preserve its ancient monuments. Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople, which had a beginning as Christian cities quite as promising as that of Rome, possess hardly a fragment of their early Christian buildings, and can show few or no traces of the life and customs of the primitive Christians. All evidences of their early Christian state have been swept away by a change of inhabitants and a change of religion, while Rome is still rich in ancient Christian monuments. It is in Rome alone that we find well-preserved remains of those sacred paintings and decorations which could once have been seen in every Christian city. Rome, therefore, must be our principal teacher in the study of Christian antiquities.

The cemeteries of the dead are the most enduring of monuments. It is in the catacombs of Rome that the earliest specimens of Christian painting must be sought. Christian art in its first state was humble and homely. It consisted of little more than house-

painting, and it was called into use for the decoration of the walls and ceilings of the sepulchral chambers. In the beginning painting was subordinate to architecture. Little by little, however, art entered upon a higher walk, and, if it was rude in style, it took a form more distinctly sacred. And then the tombs of those who slept became something more than sepulchres of the dead ; they became declarations of the belief of the departed, and standing exhortations to the living. They spoke a sacred language well understood by the Christian brethren ; and they are lessons in devotion, which, after the lapse of sixteen centuries or more, still remain as a study for us and for those who shall come after. We learn from these early works what were the ideas most familiar to those who were accustomed to meditate in the catacombs.

Portraits, or images of persons in their natural state, were not attempted in the earliest days of Christian art. The first paintings were figurative. They expressed ideas ; they illustrated doctrine ; but they did not represent persons. Our Lord, for example, appeared as the Good Shepherd ; corn and vines denoted the Eucharist ; Abraham and Moses were borrowed from the Old Testament to illustrate the doctrines of the New.

The time at which the Virgin Mary first appeared in art, and the form in which she was first represented, are questions concerning which there has been diversity of opinion, and curious controversies have arisen in consequence. The silence of history on this point has given an advantage to the inventors of legends.

There have been some who have maintained that St. Luke painted the Virgin; and this fable, which arose in an uncritical age, has not been without supporters even in enlightened times. And authors, who would give up the idea of St. Luke as a painter, have laboured nevertheless in a similar spirit to push back the commencement of Virgin-painting to the earliest times.

It will be necessary to take notice of these opinions in the proper places. It is sufficient for the present to say that, during the eighteenth century, it was held by the best critics that the earliest form, in which the Virgin was represented in painting, was that of an Orante, as it is termed. Figures called Oranti, standing with arms spread wide open in the form of a cross, may frequently be seen on the walls of the catacombs, on sarcophagi, and on gilded glasses. They are most frequently females. St. Agnes, and a few more whose names are known, were thus commemorated in the form of Oranti; and many of the faithful, whose names are unknown, were represented in the same form in painting and sculpture by order of the Church, or by the care of private friends.

In some few instances the Virgin Mary is undoubtedly represented as an Orante. And it is probably true that this was the earliest form in which she was painted; and the more recent literature on the subject of the catacombs has shown no reason to the contrary. Lanzi says, in his *History of Painting*, that "in the first ages of the Church the Virgin was not represented with the Holy Infant in her arms,

but with her hands extended in the act of prayer."* He refers to a glass then kept in the Museo Trombelli in Bologna, on which the Virgin appears as an Orante, with her name MARIA inscribed. A similar glass is said to be in the museum of the Propaganda in Rome. These glasses probably belong to the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth. An example of the Virgin as an Orante in the scene of the Ascension is given by d'Agincourt from an early Syrian manuscript, and one belonging to the seventh century may be seen in the Chapel of St. Venantius in Rome. One or two more examples are produced by those who have written on the subject.

From these few cases, in which it is beyond dispute that the Virgin is the person represented, it may be supposed without difficulty that she was painted in a similar manner in other cases which have not been proved. It is very probable that some few out of the numerous figures which are seen in the same attitude may have been intended for the Virgin, although it would not be possible, without some plain indication, to distinguish her from other female Saints, and we have to accept the mass of them on that understanding.

These are all the facts which can be determined with certainty. There is no objection to be brought, *à priori*, against the supposition that the Virgin Mary would have a front place among the Saints

* *Lower Italy*, Book III., Epoch I.

honoured by the Church. From what we know of the spirit of the fourth century, there is every reason to expect that the Virgin Mary would appear in art as early as Peter, Paul, and Agnes. These were in an especial manner Roman Saints and Roman Martyrs ; and it cannot surprise us to find that they were commemorated by Roman Christians more anciently than John the Evangelist, or John the Baptist, or Stephen. But the Virgin Mary was instrumental in a mystery which was confessed equally by the whole Church ; and it would have been strange indeed if she had been forgotten in Rome. Although no festival, in which the name of the Virgin was especially mentioned, was instituted before the end of the fifth century, still there is abundant evidence to show that she was had in remembrance wherever the Christian faith was confessed. Churches began to be dedicated to her soon after the Council of Nice.* The Church founded by Liberius in Rome, now called Santa Maria Maggiore, and the Church in the quarter called Trastevere, and that in Ephesus in which the Council was held, were consecrated in honour of the Virgin Mary. To this it may be added that the name of Mary began to be given to children as a Christian name. The daughter of Stilicho, who was married to the Emperor Honorius, was named Maria. Mr. Hemans remarks that the name of Maria, following the family name of Livia, occurs in the year 381. A monumental stone found at Messina bears record

* Gregory Naz. *Christus Patiens*, 965.

that Maria died aged two years in the Consulship of Flavius Ariobindus and Flavius Aspar—that is, in the year 434; so that this child was born immediately after the Council of Ephesus.* If the name of Mary began to have this influence on the practice of Christians, we should naturally expect to find images of her placed among those of other sacred persons who were the first to be commemorated in the paintings and sculptures of the Church. The omission of her effigy would have been difficult to explain.

However, when it is admitted that some few of the females who are seen in the attitude of prayer may have been intended for the Virgin Mary, a very important question forces itself into notice. It is a remarkable thing that, in the early period of Christian art, no distinction should have been made between the Virgin and other Saints. And it is natural to ask whether the figure of the Orante was used in the first instance to represent the Virgin, or whether it came into use originally as the mode of representing Saints in general. If the same useful and accommodating fashion served equally well for both purposes, we have to consider whether this fashion was designed for the Virgin, and afterwards made common to other Saints, or whether it was first chosen as the mode of representing the Saints, and then accepted as the most convenient that could be found for the Virgin as soon as a mode of art-treatment was required for

* Siciliæ et adjacentium insularum veterum inscriptionum nova collectio. Panormi. 1769.

her. The Church used the same design as being sufficient for both cases; and there was nothing in the belief and sentiments of the Christians of those times which made it necessary for painters to invent a special art-treatment suited to the Virgin and limited to her alone. And they who labour to convince us of the early rise and growth of Virgin-painting ought to have told us whether the familiar figure of the Orante was designed by the Church expressly for the Virgin, or whether it passed to the Virgin from the Saints. But we look to them in vain for an answer to this question.

This is the only important question connected with this part of the subject. And we are not without such historical evidence as may throw light upon the point in question, and guide us to a satisfactory decision. We know from Christian writers that living persons were accustomed to offer their devotions with hands extended in the form of a cross.* Tertullian speaks of the faithful praying *manibus expansis*. Minucius Felix and Origen mention the same thing. Prudentius tells a story, which at least proves the custom of praying in the posture of an Orante. He says that, at the martyrdom of a Saint, the cords which confined his arms were miraculously reduced to ashes, so that he might be able to raise his hands in the form of a cross.

*Non ausa est cohibere pœna palmas
In morem crucis ad Patrem levandas.*

* Bingham, Book XIII., ch. viii., section 10.

A custom is proved by Christian writers to have existed in the Church, which was observed in Alexandria and Carthage, as well as in Rome. It cannot be believed that the idea of the Orante owed its origin to the mere imagination of the painter, and that the Church was so poor in resources as to take hints from the artist. It is hardly likely that Tertullian, Origen, and Minucius Felix spoke of a Catholic practice which Christians had learnt from wall-paintings. We must reverse the order. The idea came not from the painter to the Church, but from the Church to the painter. The posture of the Orante was known in the congregation before it appeared in art ; and it was borrowed by artists from the practice of the living as the most suitable posture for the images of the departed. They who had been seen alive with arms extended in the act of prayer, were so represented in pictures painted in memory of them after death. And it is not improbable that the writings of the three Fathers just mentioned may coincide in point of time with the first appearances of Oranti in wall-painting.

Some of these Oranti were undoubtedly Martyrs, whose names were commemorated in their respective Churches on the anniversaries of their departure ; for, next to the Festivals of Pascha and Pentecost, these days were the first which were observed annually in the Church. Other pictures of Oranti were probably painted to the memory of private persons by the care of surviving friends. Martyrs, Saints, and departed Christians, were naturally the first who

were painted in an attitude which was characteristic of them when alive.

The history of the Orante as a subject for art is thus made clear. The figure of the Orante was not, in fact, an invention of the painter; it was copied from life; and it was first used in representing Saints and departed Christians.

And the steps of the process, by which the idea of a praying Virgin was gained, were the following:—The posture of the Orante was the posture in which the living Christian was seen to offer his prayers. Secondly, it was borrowed by the painter as the most natural and becoming attitude in which the Saint could be represented on his monument after his departure. And lastly, the same familiar model was accepted as the best which could be imagined for the Virgin herself, whose appearance in art was of necessity later than the conditions on which it depended.

This is the first question worthy of discussion in the history of Virgin-painting. The Virgin as an Orante was later than the Martyrs and Saints in her appearance in sacred art. Indeed, it may be said, as a general rule, that the portraits, if we may call them so, of the more distinguished persons named in the Gospel, appeared later than the figures which were intended to serve as monuments of departed Christians. This may be said not only of the Virgin, but also of our Lord and of St. Peter and St. Paul, whose portraits began to be painted in the early part of the fourth century. The attempt to paint a figure, which should be accepted as the likeness of a sacred per-

son, was the sign of an advanced state of Christian art.

When artists first attempted to portray the Virgin, none of the pretensions which have been made in later times were put forward. It was not as the Queen of heaven, but as a Saint of God, that the Virgin Mary was represented before the eyes of the early Christians. The first idea of the Church, in picturing the Virgin, was that of ascribing to her pure saintliness, without attempting more. The portrait of the Virgin thus painted was not part of a scene taken from Scripture, it was not an expression of doctrine; it was a personal memorial, it was an image of the Virgin dear to the Church. The portrait of the Virgin Mary as an Orante denoted her personal character rather than her office. Controversies, in which her office was brought into discussion, had hardly yet begun. No doctrine in which the Virgin herself was intimately concerned was brought into question during the first four centuries. Art had not yet been required to invest her with attributes distinct from those of other Saints, peculiar to herself, and expressive of her office. The artist had no need to paint picture-doctrine as a protest against errors which the theologian himself had not as yet been obliged to refute. The Scriptural subjects of the Annunciation and the Purification had not then been touched by the Christian artist, because the Church had not then begun to keep those Festivals. The ideas expressed by the Church both in language and in painting were fewer. After a while the artist

had to change his course according to circumstances. When the heresy arose which caused the Council of Ephesus to be assembled, then the Orante was no longer sufficient to express adequately the idea which the Church held concerning the Virgin Mary, and that mode of representation fell into disuse accordingly. A new treatment was devised to suit the altered times, and to persist in the old way would have been to favour Arius and Nestorius. But, until the heresy, which denied that the Child born of the Virgin Mary was from the time of His Incarnation God as well as man, compelled the Church to be more precise in its forms and statements, the idea of a praying Virgin sufficed. And the opinion already mentioned appears to be well founded; and it may be said with truth that the Virgin as an Orante is peculiar to the times which preceded the Council of Ephesus.

This unpretending figure was the first utterance of art in Virgin-painting. Whether it made its appearance a little earlier or a little later, and whether it was repeated more or less frequently, are questions of sacred art which it would be interesting to determine, if it were possible, but they are of no doctrinal importance. There was no danger of corruption of doctrine in a picture of the Virgin in which she was not distinguished from any other female Saint. They who were accustomed to these representations of the Virgin could not have been led by them into errors of belief. Nor will such paintings give any support to modern corruptions of doctrine. If early

examples of the Virgin as an Orante had been as numerous as any heart could desire, they would not prove the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption of the Virgin; nor could any argument have been drawn from the simple idea of the primitive Christians in defence of the creations of the modern Italian schools of painting.

In a recently-published work, Mr. Brownlow, speaking of his arguments concerning the Virgin as an Orante, says that "the question of our Lady's position in the most ancient field of Christian art by no means depends upon them." If Mr. Brownlow does not find this ground strong enough for his purpose, he will seek in vain for any other. He adds: "If these paintings do not represent her, yet she certainly appears in more than a score of other scenes where her identity cannot be questioned."* He nourishes a delusive hope, if he thinks that the paintings of the Adoration of the Magi will help him to find a place for the Virgin in the most ancient field of Christian art. Nor indeed has he shown what benefit his cause would receive from a Scriptural scene in which the Virgin Mary is introduced, even if the work could be proved to be of the highest antiquity.

* *Roma Sotterranea*, by Dr. Northcote and Mr. Brownlow, p. 256.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCULPTURES OF THE SARCOPHAGI.

THE tombs of the more wealthy Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries were sarcophagi enriched with carvings of religious subjects.

The sarcophagus of the Empress Helena shows upon it no Christian device whatever. That of Constantia, the daughter of Constantine, is ornamented merely with the Christian emblems of vines and children employed in the vintage.

The tomb of Junius Bassus is one of the most interesting relics of early Christian times. Upon it Christ is sculptured seated between two Apostles. The other subjects are the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Patience of Job, the Fall of Adam and Eve, Daniel in the den of lions, Christ riding into Jerusalem, Peter denying Christ, Christ before Pilate, Peter arrested, and a few other groups. On this beautiful tomb there is no appearance of the Virgin Mary. An inscription on the sarcophagus bears record that Junius Bassus died in the year 359.

The sarcophagus of Probus, which is known by an inscription on a tablet found near it, is kept in St. Peter's Church. It is ornamented with figures of

Christ and ten Apostles. Christ is known by His position and by the tall jewelled cross which He holds in His hand. There is nothing remarkable in His appearance. The figure is dignified, the face is beardless, and the fashion in general is that of a Roman of the period. Probus, the head of the great Anician family, died about the end of the fourth century.

Another sarcophagus, very similar to that of Probus, is supposed to be that of his son. Upon neither of these tombs does the Virgin appear in any form.

Very few of the sarcophagi have names or dates inscribed on them. Concerning the vast majority of them we know only this, that each of them once contained the remains of a Christian. Their own internal evidence must be to us the principal source of information. When they are collected together in sufficient numbers, and divided into classes according to their peculiarities, it is possible to form a judgment as to the epoch to which each class belongs, and as to the principle on which the Scriptural scenes which are sculptured on them were chosen. And this is one of the most profitable and interesting studies connected with ancient Christian art.

A grand collection of sarcophagi has been made in the Lateran palace in Rome, where they may be conveniently examined and compared. The sarcophagi are handsome tombs of white marble eight feet long or more, adorned with *bassi rilievi* on every side, especially on that which faces outwards. They are

all wonderfully alike, and in the confusion of the first acquaintance with them it is difficult to see why one should be considered older than another, or in what respect one is different from another. But they may be reduced to order, and, by a just classification, they may be made to explain themselves.

It is enough for superficial observers to see in these sculptures the common-place arguments which served on every occasion as consolations to those who mourned. It has been sometimes supposed that these sarcophagi answered the purpose of modern tombstones and tablets; and that any scriptural subject whatever could be sculptured upon them in compliance with the wishes of surviving relatives, or according to the taste of the person whose business it was to make arrangements for the funeral. And it has been supposed that dulness of imagination was the cause why one sculptor trod in the steps of another, and repeated the usual subjects with so little variety.

A better explanation than this must be sought. It may indeed be fully admitted that the sculptures and paintings of the Christian cemeteries suggested consoling thoughts, accidentally at least if not by design, and probably they were frequently regarded as a source of comfort. Chrysostom himself refers to them as a support to his faith and courage. He says in a letter written to Cyriacus while they were both in exile: "If the Empress thinks proper to banish me, let her banish; the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. And, if she desires to saw

me asunder, let her saw; I have Esaias for an example. And, if she wishes to hurl me into the sea, I reflect upon Jonas. If she wishes to cast me into the furnace, I have before me the Three Children who suffered the same thing. If she wishes to give me to the wild beasts, I call to mind Daniel thrown into the den of lions." Chrysostom wrote these words in manifest allusion to the familiar scenes from Scripture, which adorned the tombs of the departed in Antioch and Constantinople as well as in Rome.

But these scenes were not selected merely as grounds of consolation. And the choice of them was not arbitrary. The remarkable sameness with which they were repeated leads us to conclude that the artist was governed by some law. That law is what we have to discover.

In a work which has been already mentioned Dr. Northcote says: "Not only were the artists limited within a narrow cycle of subjects; even in their mode of treating these, they were not left wholly to themselves. They did not treat them either accurately as facts of history, nor freely as subjects of the imagination, but strictly with a view to their spiritual meaning; and since this is always the same, religious dogma imparted something of its own fixedness of character to the art which it vouchsafed to employ."* This is true: but Dr. Northcote, having led us to expect that he was about to explain to us the spiritual meaning which he supposes to be

* *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 240.

contained in the symbolical paintings, leaves us unsatisfied. He says again: "The sight of these paintings on the walls of their subterranean chapels was probably as a continual homily set before the practised minds of the faithful of the first three centuries, and by them perfectly understood."* These words would have been quite true, if they had been written of the Christians of the third and fourth centuries. But Dr. Northcote again raises our expectations and again disappoints them. He seems to think that there ought to be a theory concerning the interpretation of these monuments; but he has no theory of his own to offer.

Mr. Burgon in his *Letters from Rome* has done a much greater service to the study of Christian antiquities. He has given us a list of the subjects represented on the sarcophagi in the Lateran museum. From his list we learn the comparative frequency with which every scriptural subject occurs. Such an enumeration must be the basis of all just reasonings concerning the interpretation of the sculptures; and, with these numbers before us, we may apply ourselves to the task of discovering the reason for which these subjects were chosen.

Several scriptural scenes appear on each sarcophagus, but some occur more frequently than others, as the following list made by Mr. Burgon from fifty-five sarcophagi will show:

* *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 249.

The History of Jonas . . .	23	The Temptation of Adam	
Moses Striking the Rock . .	21	and Eve	10
The Miracle of the Loaves . .	20	The Woman Healed	8
The Apprehension of Christ		The Good Shepherd	6
(or Peter)	20	Christ Riding into Jerusalem	6
Christ Giving Sight to the		Noah in the Ark	5
Blind	19	Christ before Pilate	5
Water made Wine	16	Adam and Eve after the Fall	4
Christ Raising Lazarus . . .	16	Moses Receiving the Law . .	4
Daniel in the Den	14	The Three Children	4
Peter Denying Christ	14	Christ Bearing His Cross . .	3
The Paralytic Healed	12	Moses Putting off his Shoes .	2
The Creation of Eve	11	The Translation of Elijah .	2
The Sacrifice of Isaac	11	The Nativity of Christ . . .	1
The Adoration of the Magi . .	11	Christ Crowned with Thorns .	1

From this list there is much to be learnt. Let us take the first two subjects on the list. The scenes in which Jonas and Moses appear occur more frequently than any other. They occur more than twice as often as the Adoration of the Magi in which the Virgin appears. The Nativity of our Lord appears once only in Mr. Burgon's list, though one or two examples have been added to the collection recently. We also learn something from the omission of that which might have been expected to appear. The Annunciation, which has been painted as often as most other subjects in modern times, is not found in the list.

A simple inspection of the list is almost enough to let in light upon it, and to suggest to us the principle on which these scenes from Scripture were chosen. It is not hazardous to assert that the greater part of these sculptures were executed as illustrations of the two primitive Festivals Pascha

and Pentecost. The scenes from the histories of Jonas and Moses have a symbolical reference to the events commemorated in those two Festivals.

Let it be observed that the story of Jonas, which has clear reference to the Resurrection of our Lord, and was the type chosen by our Lord Himself, occurs twenty-three times. The water issuing from the rock struck by Moses occurs twenty-one times, and it denotes with equal significance the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Other subjects may be ranged under one or the other of these two heads. The sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel in the den, the Three Children in the fire, the raising of Lazarus, Christ riding into Jerusalem, and Christ before Pilate, are in a peculiar manner Paschal subjects. And the arrest of Peter, if it is rightly so described, is, according to the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, a subject which belongs to Easter. In like manner, Moses receiving the Law, and Moses putting off his shoes, are subjects which especially belong to Whitsuntide.

And these two Feasts were also the great baptismal seasons, to which circumstance allusion is made. The creation and fall of man, Noah in the ark, the illumination of the blind, and the cure of the paralytic, are the best lessons which could be found to teach the efficacy of that Sacrament, which is a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness. And, that the Eucharist may have its appropriate emblems, the miracle of the loaves is counted twenty times, and the change of water into wine sixteen.

It may be inferred, therefore, that art was employed for the illustration of the ritual of the Church. History and sacred art are found to agree together. We have on the one hand historical testimony to the primitive observance of Pascha and Pentecost, and on the other hand we have monuments repeatedly executed in painting and sculpture which have plain reference to the Resurrection of Christ and the Descent of the Holy Ghost. This double coincidence could not have happened by mere chance ; this repetition of the same combination could not have been without a purpose. There was a design in these frequently repeated stories of Jónas and Moses ; there was a rule followed in these sculptures which so closely correspond with the ritual of the Church. Pascha and Pentecost were for a long time the only Festivals observed. And when we find Christian monuments showing upon them illustrations of the two Festivals of Pascha and Pentecost, and of none other, we may conclude that these monuments were made to illustrate these Festivals, when these alone were celebrated in the Church.

And if this is a true and just explanation of the matter, then we cannot be surprised to find Elijah introduced in connexion with Easter and Whitsuntide. Nothing is more natural than that the Ascension of Christ should have a place among the sculptures. Mr. Brownlow sees in the mantle which fell upon Elisha a token of the vicariate of St. Peter and of Papal supremacy, and in that explanation he finds all that he

requires.* But the marble cannot have any force which the Scripture has not, and it would have been a more concise way to claim the second chapter of the second Book of Kings as a proof of the rights of St. Peter.

Mr. Brownlow sees in Moses also nothing but a type of Peter, and in the water, which flowed from the rock, he sees nothing but the powers of the Apostolic See. He produces two examples of gilded glass, on which St. Peter is represented as bringing water out of the rock. And he argues that, because on one occasion Peter resembled Moses, therefore throughout the Old Testament Peter is prefigured in Moses as the leader and lawgiver of God's people. That is a large edifice to build on so small a foundation. In the scene of the smitten rock, the comparison is not between Moses and Peter simply, but between the Jewish Pentecost and the Christian Pentecost, between the symbolical supply of water under the Old Law and the real gifts of the Spirit under the New Law or Gospel. The offices of Moses and Peter were to some extent parallel on those occasions. It was Peter who stood up with the eleven, and explained to the Jews the cause of that spiritual outpouring of which they saw the effects: "He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." It was Peter who said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."†

* *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 310.

† The Acts of the Apostles, c. ii. v. 38.

Peter therefore may justly be considered as the Moses of the day of the Christian Pentecost, so long as his eleven associates are not quite forgotten. The idea of Peter filling the part of Moses seems to be an afterthought peculiar to Rome, and it is a curious mixture of history with symbolism, of the real with the figurative. Still, if Mr. Brownlow will explain the figure of Peter striking the rock by the second chapter of the Acts, if he will see in the flowing water a symbol of the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, there will not be much ground left for controversy in that matter.

Thus far we have been obliged to clear the way for that which is to follow.

An important class of subjects remains to be considered. The Adoration of the Magi does not enter into either of the divisions already mentioned; it constitutes a division by itself. It occurs eleven times, according to Mr. Burgon's list; that is, its appearance is not half as frequent as that of Jonas or of Moses. This fact needs explanation. They, who labour to prove that the subject of the Adoration of the Magi was painted at a very early period, will have to admit that the Child seated on the Virgin's lap did not meet with favour equal to that which was bestowed upon Moses and Jonas. But this seeming neglect may easily be explained. The Adoration of the Magi belongs to a later period; as a subject for art it was later in the field, it had a shorter career to run, and therefore examples of it are fewer in number. The analysis made by Mr. Burgon shows that

at the least twelve examples of Jonas and at the least ten examples of Moses are seen on sarcophagi on which the Magi do not appear. That fact is worth much. It proves that to a large extent the latter subject did not find a place on the marbles on which the two former were sculptured. It proves that while the two former subjects ran an even course from beginning to end, and met generally on the same monuments, the latter did not always accompany them, but followed a different rule. Difference in the time of commencement explains the reason why the examples of the Adoration of the Magi are fewer in number and constitute a separate class. It will be found on examination that Jonas and Moses appear, as a rule, in company with the earlier or symbolical subjects, while the Adoration of the Magi connects itself more frequently with the later or historical subjects. It must therefore be determined that the Adoration of the Magi was later in its appearance than those subjects which are figurative of Pascha and Pentecost.

The Adoration of the Magi, in which subject the Virgin Mary is introduced, illustrates the Epiphany according to the ritual of the Italian Church, and it became a subject for art when the Epiphany began to be celebrated as a Festival in Rome. It is important to trace this Festival to its origin, and to ascertain the probable time of its commencement in Italy and in Rome. This is the second great question in the history of Virgin-painting.

The first historical notice of the Epiphany as a

Festival of the Church is found in Ammianus Marcellinus, who relates that Julian, a little before his apostasy, went to Church and worshipped on the day of the Epiphany.* This happened in the year 361. The Epiphany was a Festival of Eastern origin; and Julian when he kept it was in Gaul, where the traditions of the Eastern Church were observed.

The next mention of the Epiphany occurs in an oration of Gregory of Nazianzus, in which he states that the orthodox Prelate Basil the Great officiated in the presence of the Arian Emperor Valens on the Feast of the Epiphany;† and a discourse, preached by Gregory himself on the occasion of the Epiphany, is extant.‡

Chrysostom also makes mention of this Festival; and he says that the Church has three Festivals, like those of the Jews but more excellent, Epiphany, Pascha, and Pentecost.§ This statement is conclusive as to the number of Festivals kept at that time in places known to Chrysostom.

But here there is an important observation to make. The Epiphany in the Eastern Church was the Feast of the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, and the Adoration of the Wise Men at Bethlehem was not connected with it, and therefore the Virgin Mary had no part in it. The Epiphany in the Greek portion of the Church was the declaration of the

* Thomassin, *Traité des Fêtes de l'Église*, Livre II. ch. 7; Gibbon, note in ch. XXII.

† Gregory Naz. Oration, XX.

‡ Oration, XXXIX.

§ Chrysostom, Homily XLVI.

divinity of Christ to the Jews, and not the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Gregory, in his discourse on this subject, calls the Feast the "holy day of lights;" he says that it had its origin from the Baptism of Christ, and he preaches on Baptism in general as the proper subject for the occasion.

Chrysostom, preaching on the Epiphany, explains the reason why it was so called. He says that Christ was made manifest to all, not at His Birth but at His Baptism, for that was the time when He was openly declared to be the Son of God.*

The Feast of the Epiphany, or of the Baptism of Christ, was kept in the Eastern Church in honour of the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God. It was probably instituted in consequence of the Arian controversy, and not long after the Council of Nice.

The Festival passed into the Latin Church from the East; it was observed on the same day, the 6th of January, and it retained its Greek name. But a remarkable change took place in the idea connected with the word Epiphany when the Festival was received into the West. The lesson peculiar to the day was altered; the sign given to the Gentiles took the place of the sign given to the Jews; and, instead of the Baptism of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi became the appropriate Gospel for the day.

St. Ambrose preached the first of his sermons on the Epiphany from the passage of St. Matthew which has reference to the offerings of the Wise Men; and

* Chrysostom, Homily XXXVII.

he explained the meaning of the Greek word as if it was something new to his Italian hearers. But it may be observed that in his sermons on that Feast he makes frequent mention of the Baptism of Christ, which seems to show that the Oriental idea still clung to the word, and that the Western idea had not yet been able to obtain a firm footing.

St. Augustine has left several sermons on the Epiphany. The beginning of the first of them is as follows: "A little while ago we celebrated the day on which the Lord was born of the Jews; to-day we celebraté that on which He was worshipped by the Gentiles. On that day the shepherds adored Him, on this the Magi." And all the sermons preached by Augustine on the Epiphany speak of the faith and zeal of the Magi, as if their connexion with the Feast had then become a settled idea.

The important point to determine is the time at which the Epiphany became an established Festival of the Western Church. We have to consider what time would be required for the introduction of it from the East into the West, and for the change of the subject, which was its peculiar lesson, from the Baptism of Christ by John to the Adoration of Him by the Magi. The interests of the Church did not make progress rapidly under the sons of Constantine; and uniformity in matters of Church ritual was not considered a point of the first importance. If we suppose, as we reasonably may, that the Festival had its commencement in the principal cities of the East not long after the Council of Nice, and if we allow

sufficient time for the transmission of it into the West, we shall be very near the truth in saying that it was received into some parts of Italy unostentatiously in the latter half of the fourth century, a little before, or during, the episcopate of St. Ambrose.

But whatever may have been the time at which the Epiphany began to be kept in some few of the Italian cities, it is certain that, on the accession of the orthodox Theodosius to imperial power, this and the other Feasts of the Church were celebrated with additional devotion and honour throughout the whole empire. Paganism was no longer recognised as the religion of the State; the temples of the gods were closed; heathen sacrifices were declared unlawful, and heathen festivals were abolished. The Christian religion, which had been tolerated since the Edict of Milan, became, under Theodosius, the religion of the State. And this change made a change in the public business of the empire. The Christian Festivals then began to be observed by command of the civil power, as well as by order of the Church. A law was made by Theodosius and Valentinian II., regulating the holy days which were to be kept in the courts of justice in the Western part of the empire. In this law notice was taken of the Feast of the Epiphany, which was to be kept on the 6th of January as in the Eastern Church.*

The celebration of this Festival throughout the

* Thomassin, *Traité des Fêtes de l'Église*, Livre I. ch. 4.

empire may be regarded as the triumph of orthodoxy over the heresy of Arius.

These circumstances determine the period at which the Adoration of the Magi might be expected to appear in Roman works of art. It was neither one of the earliest subjects, nor was it represented for the sake of the Virgin Mary; for these are the points in dispute. The time of Theodosius and of his son Honorius may be confidently said to be the time at which the first sculptures which illustrate the Epiphany were executed. All the sarcophagi in Rome, which show the Child sitting on the Virgin's lap and worshipped by the Wise Men, may be considered to belong to a period commencing from the year 380. And painting must follow the rule of sculpture. No reason can be shown why colour should have been used earlier than marble, or why the thought of representing the Adoration of the Magi should have struck the painter sooner than the sculptor. It is absurd to suppose that the Church would have favoured the practice of painting the Child on the Virgin's lap in the catacombs, and forbidden the practice of carving the same subject on the sarcophagi. The painter and the sculptor must be placed on the same footing; and the twenty paintings or so, which may be found on the walls of the catacombs, whatever critics may say, cannot be considered to be earlier than the establishment of the Feast of the Epiphany in Rome.

The next subject in which the Virgin Mary appears is the Nativity of Christ, of which Mr. Burgon's list gives one example. Four are found copied in Bosio's

work, of which probably two or three have been added to the Lateran collection since Mr. Burgon wrote. The Nativity is a very rare subject in ancient Christian art. There are not more than four or five examples of it in sculpture to be found in Rome, and not one in painting.

The Festival of the Nativity is of Western origin, though the beginning of it is involved in obscurity. In the absence of authentic history we have legends. In the *Liber Pontificalis* it is stated that Telesphorus, who died in the year 138, sang Mass on Christmas-eve; and Nicephorus, who wrote about the year 1300, says that Diocletian set fire to a church and burnt the Christians who were assembled in it on Christmas-day. These stories written by no contemporary hand are unworthy of credit.

It would seem that in the time of Augustine and Jerome the Nativity did not rank on an equality with Pascha and Pentecost, or even with the Epiphany.

Ambrose is the first of the Latin Fathers who speaks of Christmas. Four sermons are extant which were preached by him on this Festival. In one of his treatises he traces back the Festival to the time of Liberius. He reminds his sister Marcellina of the words addressed to her at the time of her consecration, and says: "When at the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord you marked your profession of virginity by a change of garment, Liberius said, Daughter, thou hast chosen a good marriage."*

* Ambrose de *Virginibus*, Liber. III.

The Nativity as a Festival can be traced back no farther, and in the time of Liberius it was probably of very recent institution, and not known much beyond Rome. If it had been known in Rome in the time of Constantine, it would most likely have been introduced by him into Constantinople, and from there into the other cities of the East.

An example of the Nativity sculptured on a slab of marble is mentioned by Messrs. Northcote and Brownlow, who refer to Commendatore de' Rossi as their authority.* This is a very early example of the subject, and it was probably executed at the time of the first observance of the Festival. Though the marble is a fragment, it contains the entire subject of the Nativity, and the names of the Consuls Placidus and Romulus, who held office in the year 343, mark the date. The Child is lying down wrapped in swaddling-clothes; two shepherds stand amazed; the ox and the ass are there to indicate the circumstances of the Nativity. The order in which the subject is noticed in the book of Messrs. Northcote and Brownlow might lead the reader to suppose that the Virgin Mary also was among the group. That is not the case. The subject is merely the Adoration of the Shepherds, and it did not serve as an occasion of introducing the Virgin.

The next example of the subject, which can be produced, belongs to a period a century and a half later. Bosio gives four examples of sarcophagi with

* *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 258.

the Nativity sculptured on them. These are well worthy of attention, because they carry with them undeniable proof that the paintings and sculptures of the early Church were designed as illustrations of the Festivals. It happens very fortunately that these examples of the Nativity appear in conjunction with other subjects, which leave no doubt as to the age of the work or the intention of the artist.

In the example given by Bosio on page 63, the Child is seen lying in a cradle or crib of basket-work, which was probably the manger of ancient days, though it is not quite like the manger of a modern English stable. It is a large basket, not attached to any building, but loose and moveable. This crib is placed on the ground under a shed with the ox and the ass standing by it, in allusion perhaps to the words of Isaiah, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." A shepherd holding a crook or staff looks with admiration upon the Child, and the Virgin is seated near between two palm-trees. The Magi also are introduced. The Magi, who are never represented in early art in the attitude of prostration, are seen advancing, and one of them carries two turtle doves. These facts explain themselves. In one single group we have an illustration of three Festivals combined—the Nativity, the Epiphany, and the Purification. The Child and the Virgin Mary appear once only to suit all the three occasions, and one of the Magi is made to carry the doves for the sake of economising space.

If there has been up to this time any doubt as to the right interpretation of these scenes taken from Scripture, there cannot be a more convincing proof than that which this sarcophagus affords. The meaning is as plain as if it had been written in express terms. And when several Festivals were illustrated on the same marble, that which was latest in institution would determine the age of the work. We are sure that the sculpture now under notice could not have been executed until the Feast of the Purification had been established, just as, when Moses and the Adoration of the Magi meet on the same marble, we know that the work was done after the commencement of the Epiphany. History informs us that Gelasius, wishing to put an end to the Lupercalia, which still continued contrary to law to be observed in Rome, ordered that the Feast of the Purification should be celebrated in February to take the place of the pagan festival. This sarcophagus therefore, which bears on it figures illustrative of the Nativity, the Epiphany, and the Purification, was probably made in the sixth century during the time of Theodoric's rule in Italy.

The sarcophagus on page 287 of Bosio shows the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi in two separate groups. In the Nativity the Child, dressed in swaddling clothes, is laid on a kind of table covered with a cloth. Two shepherds, with curved sticks in their hands, gaze on Him with delight; the ox and the ass are there; the Virgin does not appear. In the Adoration of the Magi the Child

is seated on the Virgin's lap, and one of the Magi, as before, carries the turtle doves. There can be no doubt as to the age of this sarcophagus ; the turtle doves mark the date of it.

On page 289 Bosio gives another sarcophagus illustrating the same Festivals. The Child is laid, as before, in a crib or basket under a shed with the ox and the ass. A shepherd, crook in hand, beholds the Child with astonishment. The Virgin sits near. The star appears in the sky. The three Magi approach dressed in the usual Oriental fashion, and the last of them carries the doves significant of the Purification.

The last example of the Nativity given by Bosio on page 589 shows that Festival in conjunction with the Baptism of Christ. This may be of the same age as those which have already been described. It is by no means a very early work.

The law which governed the province of sacred art has now been clearly ascertained. The Festivals supplied the artist with subjects for his work. And we have a right to conclude that every work was done in obedience to this law. There is no place for exception ; the Church was consistent with itself, and could not have sanctioned variable or contradictory practices ; and no artist could out of his own private judgment have introduced novelties unauthorised by the Church.

It is time to reflect upon what has been said concerning these interesting monuments, and to consider what we are taught by the absence of the

Virgin from the earlier monuments and by her appearance on those which belong to a comparatively later period. Before the Council of Nice no Festival had been instituted in which the Virgin Mary could appear. Easter and Whitsuntide were the only great seasons known. These two Festivals had not been called into existence as a defence against error, they were not the result of controversy, they were the free offerings of a faithful Church. When the doctrine of the true nature of Christ had been defined as a safeguard against heresy, then other Festivals began to be observed in the Church in acknowledgment of that doctrine, and as a mode of bringing it plainly before the attention of the people. Without Arius the Church would have needed neither Christmas nor Epiphany. When it became necessary to defend Catholic truth against Arius and his followers, then the Festivals of the Baptism and Nativity of Christ were appointed: then the worship paid to Him by the Shepherds and the Magi in acknowledgment of His divinity became a lesson and an example to all people. And sacred art followed the rule of the Festivals and illustrated them. And the introduction of the Virgin Mary into the pictured scenes of the early life of Christ has precisely the same significance as the mention of her name in the Creed. The Virgin is not there for her own sake; she is there because she bore a part in the great mystery of the Incarnation. And this reason is sufficient. She holds her Child in her arms while others worship Him.

If a higher antiquity should be claimed for any representation of the Virgin than that which would be allowed by the law which governs sacred art, that claim must be received with the greatest suspicion of error. An attempt is sometimes made to call in the aid of art-criticism, and so to find a pretext for assigning to some of the works of ancient Christian art an age earlier than what would be warranted by the established practice of the Church. The advocates of Virgin-worship press for the earliest imaginable date for every representation of the Virgin. They endeavour to procure from art-criticism a verdict favourable to their opinions, and then they use that verdict as an authority decisive of doctrine. They seek in paintings that which they cannot find in the Fathers of the Church; and they make art interpreted by private judgment an argument in favour of uncatholic opinions. According to their view painting outran oratory, and artists painted the Adoration of the Magi at the beginning of the third century, though bishops lagging behind them began to preach the Epiphany only at the end of the fourth. This would be to make taste the judge of history.

The principle which is maintained in these pages, that early Christian art illustrated the Festivals of the Church, has facts to support it, meets every exigency, and leaves nothing unexplained.

Arguments founded on taste alone, without the support of historical proof or documentary evidence, cannot overthrow arguments founded on facts. The paintings in Pompeii were done before the eruption

of Mount Vesuvius in the year 79; history determines that point; but we cannot have the like certainty in all cases without the same testimony from history. Criticism alone is not safe. Critics differ in opinion, and critics change their opinions. We know that it is possible for the best and most impartial judge to be in error as to the age of a picture, or a manuscript, or an inscription. Where style is the only evidence and taste the only judge, it will be necessary to leave a margin for possible variations of style and possible errors of judgment; and the best of critics can only hope to form a conjecture which may come tolerably close to the truth. An opinion founded on art-criticism may have authority as to the quality of a work, but not as to the precise period at which it was produced, nor as to the motives which caused it to be executed. We must be guided in our judgment by other considerations before we can judge with confidence. The critic who judges by the eye can only form conjectures more or less vague; an acquaintance with the causes which operated upon art will guide us more safely and surely to the mark.

Let it be remembered that the differences of style and quality, which separate the works of an age from those of the age next following, are very slight. D'Agincourt reckons two periods in the decline of Roman art. According to him the brilliant period continued to the time of Commodus. There is little difference to be seen in the quality of the general run of works of art produced under Nero, Hadrian, the

Antonines, and even in the time of Severus. The Apollo Belvedere is believed to be a work of the time of Nero. The art of the sculptor is considered to have attained its greatest excellence under Hadrian, and it reached the end of the second century without any very remarkable change.

The first period of decline, according to d'Agincourt, commenced from the time of Commodus, and continued till that of Jovian. A great part of the paintings in the catacombs and the earlier specimens of Christian sculpture belong to this period.

The second period of decline began from Jovian, and ended in the time of Theodoric. All the sarcophagi which show the Adoration of the Magi were executed during the second period of decline. After that time Roman art may be considered to be extinct.

These periods are long, and perhaps the sameness in the style of art was found to be such that it was not possible to make the divisions shorter or more definite. And where the alteration of style is marked by no sudden change, it would be easy to judge erroneously of a monument to the extent of a century. We can have no certainty without the testimony of history.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY PICTURES OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD.

THE Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, inferior to few Roman Churches in beauty and grandeur, inferior to none as an ancient and interesting Christian monument, may be considered as the Church commemorative of the Council of Ephesus. Founded originally in the time of Liberius, it was reconstructed by Xystus or Sixtus III. in thankful acknowledgment of the benefits of that Council. If the exterior of the Church has been injured by the audacious hands of those who have attempted to improve it, the interior is not greatly different from what it was fourteen centuries ago. The spacious floor is the same in extent, the beautiful columns of white marble stand firmly in their places, and the walls are still encrusted with the ancient mosaics which were designed to illustrate the doctrine determined by the Council.

The mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore are among the most precious and interesting examples of early Christian art. The age of them is known with exactness, for they were executed very soon after the Council of Ephesus, which was held in the year 431.

The art of working in mosaic had been brought to perfection during the flourishing days of the Roman empire. Small cubes of glass, tinged with colour or shining with gold, were laid together by a slow and careful process in the form of pictures, which time cannot easily efface. This art was providentially prepared for the use of the Church, and in the hands of the Church it became the means of giving a lasting form to the ideas of the Christian artist. The sanctity of the Church has contributed to the preservation of its monuments; for, while the mosaics which represented the battles and triumphs of the Cæsars have perished through violence or neglect, the Christian mosaics have been in many cases preserved in fair condition to the present time.

The mosaics on each side of the Church above the colonnades represent subjects taken from the Old Testament. On the triumphal arch, which faces the great entrance, are scenes from the early history of our Lord, illustrative of the doctrine of the Council of Ephesus, with figures nearly as large as life.

There are, however, many difficulties in the way of him who would examine these mosaics thoroughly and interpret them correctly; and, although they have often been described, no description of them has yet been written with perfect accuracy. Time has somewhat impaired the brilliance of the colours and the clearness of the outline; the height at which the pictures are placed prevents a close inspection of them; and the darkness of the situation makes it necessary to choose the most favourable hours of the day for

the examination. Clearness of sight and perseverance in study are necessary conditions to a right understanding of these ancient and curious pictures. It is quite distressing to hear the antiquary Ciampini relate the difficulties under which he laboured in his attempt to master them. He gazed at them long, but they did not become at all the plainer to him. He called in the assistance of friends who had the advantage of more powerful eyes than his own, but all to no purpose. He made use of the telescope, for he lived after Galileo; but telescopes in those days were not equal to the instruments which are made now. He tried experiments with a mirror, and caused the rays of the sun to be reflected on the mosaic; but still he was baffled. After many disappointments he was at length permitted to erect a scaffold, from which he was able to obtain a better view. They, who have attempted the same thing and learnt by experience what it is to examine minute objects under disadvantageous circumstances, will understand what were the difficulties of Ciampini.

Above the top of the arch is a throne, and a rainbow round about it, according to the description in the Apocalypse. And on the throne is laid the Volume of the Book, for that was the place which the Scriptures occupied in the early Councils. On each side of the throne is a medallion containing the heads of the Virgin and Child. St. Peter stands on one side and St. Paul on the other, and the four Evangelistic emblems are placed two on each side.

On the spandrels of the arch there are six subjects

referring to the Virgin and Child, three on each side. These subjects will be most conveniently described in their historical order. They are the Annunciation, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Magi before Herod, the Adoration of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Journey of Christ with Mary and with Joseph to Jerusalem.

In the Annunciation the Virgin appears in the dress of a Roman lady of the time of Galla Placidia; and she sits on a chair attended by two guardian angels. Gabriel is seen flying down from heaven to execute his mission, and above him the Dove is seen descending. In the same picture Zacharias, in the dress of a Roman, stands near the altar of incense, Gabriel appears to him and converses with him, while two Angels stand by. The Angels have the aureole or golden glory around their heads, but neither the Virgin nor Zacharias has that distinction:

This is the earliest example of the Annunciation in existence, and probably it is one of the first that were ever executed. There is no example of the subject in the catacombs nor on the sarcophagi, for the Annunciation was not as yet marked by a Festival. It seems as if this was an attempt of art to treat an unfamiliar subject, and the difficulty was increased by the endeavour to combine in one view two events which happened at different times and places. Gabriel appears twice in the same composition; and, as if to denote some distinction of time, he is on the ground in actual conversation with Zacharias, while he is in the air on his way to the Virgin.

The Nativity, or the Adoration of the Shepherds, has no place in this series of subjects. The absence of it seems to prove once more that it had not yet been able to establish its claim to a front place in sacred art.

In the Presentation of Christ in the Temple the Virgin, richly dressed, carries the Child in her arms. Joseph accompanies them. The scene is a street. Simeon and Anna are present. The temple is near, and the two turtle doves are laid as an offering before it. The Purification was not yet a Festival, and this is probably one of the first instances in which the subject was attempted.

The third picture in the order of time is the arrival of the Wise Men before Herod and his counsellors. Concerning Herod there can be no mistake, for the first letters of his name are written near him. The three Magi stand before him wearing Phrygian caps, coats of bright colours, and tight trousers gaily striped with red, blue, and gold, which dress was probably the Oriental dress as known to the Romans in the fifth century. Something is carried on a dish or tray, which possibly may be an offering for Herod. Ciampini entirely misunderstood the meaning of this mosaic. He supposed it to represent the death of John the Baptist, and he mistook the three Magi for three dancing ladies, dressed for convenience in succinct garments. The three figures are not females, they are the Magi attired in a fashion precisely similar to that in which they appear in the picture next to be considered. The death of John the Baptist could have

no connexion at all with a series of pictures intended to illustrate the Incarnation of the Word. The death of the Baptist would have brought confusion of ideas into a simple case.

Concerning the Adoration of the Magi there are important observations to be made. The Child Jesus sits on a large chair or throne by Himself, and He seems to be approaching the age of two years. The star is seen above Him. Near Him sits the Virgin Mary on a separate seat. Her dress is quite different from that which she wears in the other pictures of this series. She is not dressed as a Roman lady of the period of Galla Placidia, but in the garb of a Madonna of the middle ages. She wears a dark blue mantle which opens in front, and shows an underdress of cloth of gold, she is gravely hooded, and she has on her feet the scarlet shoes which were a mark of dignity at the court of Constantinople in later times. Angels assist. The Wise Men stand before the throne holding their offerings in their hands, and dressed as they were when they appeared before Herod. But in this picture there are only two of them. The third is missing.

To account for this irregularity it is necessary to bring an act of dishonesty to light. The mosaic has been repaired and corrupted in modern times. When Ciampini wrote his description of it, the first of the three Magi was standing before Christ in that place which the sitting Virgin now occupies, and the Virgin herself was standing on the other side of the throne. Such was the original arrangement of the group, and

such it continued to be up to the end of the seventeenth century. Then the Romans would no longer tolerate the idea of a standing Madonna. The leader of the Magi was compelled to vanish from the place which he had occupied for centuries, that he might leave a vacant space for a sitting Madonna. The stratagem was contrived with the design not only of placing the Virgin on an equality with the Child, but also of placing her between Christ and the two Magi, so that they appear to address themselves full as much to her as to Him. And the Virgin so introduced is not dressed in the fashion known to art in the time of Galla Placidia, but in the garb which was assigned to her in much later times. The change and the reason of it are equally plain to be seen. No one, at all acquainted with sacred art, could suppose for a moment that the figure of the Virgin, as it appears in the Adoration of the Magi, could be of the same epoch as those which appear in three other compositions which form part of this series. The work is modern; and the change cannot be called a restoration, it is a falsification.

The fifth subject is the Massacre of the Innocents, which had not yet become the subject of a Festival, although from its connexion with the early life of Christ it forms a very suitable part of this series. A crowd of women with black dishevelled hair is seen in a public place, each of them carrying an infant, and near them is a troop of assassins about to rush upon them. The subject comprehends, of course, the idea of the flight into Egypt,

and of the careful removal of the young Child from danger.

The last picture represents the Child Jesus going with Mary His Mother and with Joseph to Jerusalem. The Virgin is, as before, handsomely dressed like a Roman lady, and Joseph like a senator. The Child, the Virgin, and Joseph all have the aureole or golden nimbus round their heads. The scene is a street; the temple is in sight; and a crowd of strangers standing around fills up the composition.

We will consider this work first from a theological point of view, and speak of the picture-doctrine which has been preached from the walls of Santa Maria Maggiore for fourteen centuries. The scope of these pictures was to illustrate the great doctrine of the Council of Ephesus concerning the Incarnation and Nativity of Jesus Christ. The artist, or the person who instructed him, had a clear conception of the work which was to be done. The series has judiciously been made to extend over that period of the life of Christ, during which the Virgin Mary exercised a Mother's care and a Mother's authority over Him. The artist has carried the idea of the Mother's rights and the Mother's duties thus far and no farther, and he has wisely forborne where Scripture is silent. The subject is complete at the point where the series of pictures ends. There is nothing apocryphal here, nothing superfluous, nothing except what has been carefully selected from Scripture. The artist has endeavoured to show that the Word became flesh, and was born of the Virgin Mary, and increased in

wisdom and in stature according to the law of man's nature which He had assumed. There is no idea expressed of the Virgin separated from the Child, as if she had an independent glory and majesty of her own. There is no indication of the doctrine that she may be worshipped for her own sake, and that she wields authority in the name of her Son for ever. The ancient mosaics of Santa Maria have a different purpose. They tell the story of the birth and childhood of Jesus Christ, who was God from everlasting, and became God incarnate. They are an attempt to express the intimate relation which subsisted between the Child Jesus and His Mother Mary. It has been said that the Virgin holding the Child began to be painted after the time of the Council of Ephesus. That opinion has confirmation from these mosaics. The idea of the relation between the Mother and the Child, which was afterwards brought within the compass of a single picture, is here expanded over the first twelve years of the life of Christ, and expressed in a series of six pictures. Whether it is expressed in six pictures or in one, the idea is the same, and it has long been a cherished idea of the Church.

We have to speak next of the treatment of the subject as a work of art. Some of these scenes were painted perhaps for the first time on this occasion, and the novelty of the demand was a trial to Christian art. The artist was required to paint scenes in Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem; and he has painted them as if the actions represented had all taken place in Rome in the fifth century. There is nothing

which carries us to Palestine as it was in the day when Cæsar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be taxed. The artist seems to have had no conception of anything that belonged to another age and country, of anything that belonged to another world. There are no signs of anything ideal, of anything supernatural or out of the common way, except the attending Angels. Sacred art was yet in its infancy, and had not begun to give a religious character to scriptural subjects. Nothing fixed, nothing conventional, had as yet been invented and accepted as the just expression of sanctity. Sacred art in Rome worked with Roman ideas. We have in these mosaics familiar scenes of Roman life, or rather scenes of high life in Rome, painted according to the ideas of the day. The long senatorial robes of Joseph might pass as being sufficiently dignified to stand for the sign of spiritual distinction. But the attire of the Virgin, which was without doubt painted in scrupulous imitation of the best fashion of the time of Galla Placidia, has a very metropolitan air, and seems to remind us of the elegances of fashionable life. The only idea, which the Christian mind then had of painting a scene in the life of a holy person, was that of copying the life and manners of the day. The only mode, which artists knew of investing holy persons with dignity of character, was that of giving them the rank and dress of Roman patricians. The Virgin Mary was painted as a great lady, not distinguished from any other lady except by the presence of the Angels. Art did its best to represent scriptural

scenes with truth ; but art had not learnt from devotion to elevate sacred subjects above the level of ordinary life. The attempts of art to find a better mode of expressing that which is sacred will be found to be among the most interesting parts of its history.

The Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, and the mosaics which adorn it, were some of the immediate results of the Council of Ephesus. The doctrine of the Incarnation was fully established ; the name of the Virgin Mary was honoured, and her office in the Christian dispensation was acknowledged, in such memorials as this which has now been described. The mosaics of Santa Maria show what was sufficient to express Christian doctrine and to satisfy Christian sentiment in that age. If Arians and Nestorians did not build and decorate churches in commemoration of the Incarnation, we cannot wonder. The Catholic Church expressed what it believed, and set forth edifying lessons before the eyes of the congregations. It is not denied that the name and the office of the Virgin Mary were brought prominently forward by the Council of Ephesus. No Virgin-worship however was taught by that Council. The doctrine of Ephesus was a confession of the true faith concerning the two natures of Christ, and it was a condemnation of those who disputed against the Incarnation of the Word. The mystery of the Incarnation is one with which the Virgin Mary is inseparably connected. Her name must enter into every summary of the Christian faith. But nothing was done at

Ephesus to make the Virgin herself an object of adoration. She was regarded only in her relation to Him who was born of her to be the Saviour of the world.

It has been mentioned that it was held by many that the Virgin and Child began to be painted together after the time of the Council of Ephesus. In support of this opinion a Latin treatise, *De Sacris Imaginibus*, was written.* This treatise was an answer to those who maintained that St. Luke painted the Virgin, an absurd idea scarcely worth the trouble of refuting. However, the labour was not all in vain, for the author of the treatise, in proving his case, has brought forward some curious information on the subject of painting. He says that the pictures commonly attributed to St. Luke show the Virgin holding the Child in her arms, a fact which proves them to be of an age later than the Council of Ephesus. He says : " Almost all the images attributed to St. Luke, whether in painting or in sculpture, show the Deipara holding her Child. And yet no one, except a mere novice in ecclesiastical history, needs to be told that the Deipara holding the Child began to be painted in the time of the Nestorians, so that she might be shown by this sign to be the Mother of God." Several pictures, superstitiously believed to have been painted by St. Luke, are preserved as treasures in Italy. That which is kept in Bologna is perhaps the most famous. The Churches of Santa Maria Maggiore

* *Raccolta di Opuscoli Scientifici*, vol. 43. Venice: 1750.

and of Sant' Agostino in Rome boast of possessing one each. One was miraculously carried to Messina by dolphins; and a few others are kept in different places as the works of the Evangelist. All such pictures as show the Virgin holding the Child in her arms must be considered, according to the author of the treatise just mentioned, as later than the year 431. This evidence is fatal to the superstitious boast which would make any of these paintings the work of St. Luke. Such pictures could not have been painted in the time of St. Luke, nor for some centuries after it. Even if St. Luke had ever been a painter, the pictures could not be his.

The theory which supposes that the Virgin and Child began to be painted together after the Council of Ephesus is intelligible, and probably true. The monuments which are earlier than the Council show no example of the Virgin and Child as a separate subject. But after the Council the case was altered. Circumstances gave a new direction to Christian art, and suggested new ideas to meet the wants and desires of the time. It was impossible to say beforehand what turn controversy would take. But when Arius and his followers arose, then the Baptism of Christ, and the Adoration of the Magi, and the Adoration of the Shepherds, became strong arguments in the hands of preachers and painters, and they were felt to have a significance which had not been pressed into notice in earlier times. Art followed the example of the pulpit. And as the art of the fourth century was a witness against Arius, so the art of the

fifth century acted against Nestorius. The mosaics of the time of Galla Placidia are not quite the same in feeling as the sculptures of the time of Constantine. But art must in both cases be interpreted by the history of the day, and art will in both cases be justified by the circumstances of the day.

He who, without any well considered theory of sacred art, should zealously endeavour to push back all monuments indiscriminately to the first ages of the Church, would be doing all in his power to render them unmeaning, and to deprive them of the force which they have as witnesses in the controversies of the Church against error. Such a mode of proceeding, while it damages the true interests of the Church, does nothing to serve any cause. A picture of the Virgin and Child, however early a date may be claimed for it, will not prove the antiquity of Virgin-worship. No advantage can be gained by those who seek in ancient art a support for modern doctrines. But on the other hand, if it is believed that pictures of the Virgin and Child were painted as a protest against the heresy of the fifth century, then art will seem to be logical and to act with a purpose. Each early monument becomes more interesting and more precious, if it is believed to be an evidence of the zeal and vigilance of the Church against errors as they arose. Every ancient monument will then be regarded as the sign of a struggle and of a victory.

Very few pictures of the Virgin and Child can now be produced as genuine works of the fifth century

Certain old pictures, indeed, are kept in various parts of Italy, for which an extraordinary antiquity is claimed, but these probably belong to an age some centuries later than the Council of Ephesus. We know, however, that a picture of this kind existed in Constantinople in the time of Leo the Isaurian, and it was believed to have been painted by St. Luke and sent from Jerusalem. This picture to be moveable must have been painted on panel; and, since it was so old that its real history was forgotten, it might easily have been painted in the sixth century, possibly in the fifth. And similar pictures could not have been by any means rare in those times.

A painting may be seen in the catacomb of St. Agnes representing the Virgin and Child.* The Virgin is painted as an Orante, with her two hands stretched out in the act of prayer. It is difficult to say whether the Child is sitting on her lap or standing before her. The picture is the work of an unskilful hand, and it has the appearance of being an early attempt at the subject. It was probably painted at the time of transition when the Virgin was beginning to be represented as the Mother holding the Child, and it seems to combine the idea of the Virgin as an Orante with that of the Virgin with the Child on her lap. It may be about as early as the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore.

In the Lateran museum there is an interesting old mosaic which has not received from critics and

* Bosio, p. 471.

antiquaries the attention which it deserves. It represents the Virgin and Child, who stand facing each other with arms extended as if they were about to embrace each other. The Child has the aureole, the Virgin has not. The mosaic is decayed and discoloured, and it does not seem to have ever undergone repair. It is said to have been taken from the old Church of St. Peter, and it was probably one of the earliest ornaments of that Church. It may be as old as the Council of Ephesus, and one of the first examples of the Virgin and Child.

A painting of the Virgin and Child in one of the catacombs has lately been brought into notice in the work of Messrs. Northcote and Brownlow.* Concerning this painting there is much room for difference of opinion. The Virgin is seated with the Child in her arms, while a sage stands before them pointing upwards to a star. Critics are not agreed as to the interpretation of the picture, and therefore the most necessary ground for a right judgment as to the time at which it was painted is wanting. An exceedingly early date is claimed for it by some, not without great risk of error. Some have supposed that the Holy Family is represented, a subject quite unknown to early Christian art. Some have supposed that the painting is meant for the Virgin and Child and one of the Magi, which opinion cannot be received for many reasons. The picture might be supposed to signify Balaam's prophecy of the star of

* *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 258.

Jacob, but there would be objections to that interpretation. Some have thought that Isaiah is beholding Emmanuel and His Mother in a prophetic vision. That indeed is a very poetical, and perhaps the correct, interpretation of the picture. But, if so, this composition is unlike anything that was done by Christian artists of the earliest period. A conjecture shall be offered as to the source from which the idea came. Perhaps we may find such a clue in history as may justify us in assigning to the work a date a little later than the Council of Chalcedon. At the time of the controversy against Eutyches, Leo the Great in a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople maintained the Catholic doctrine; and he proved his assertions by reference to the Gospels, which trace the descent of Christ from David and Abraham, and to Isaiah, who speaks of Emmanuel the Son of a Virgin.* That passage of Isaiah became useful in the Council; and it is far more likely that Leo should have suggested an idea to the painter, than that the painter should, by anticipation, have supplied an argument to Leo. If there is any truth in this explanation, it would tend to prove that the picture was not painted in the second century, but in the fifth or sixth for the confutation of the error of Eutyches.

After the end of the fifth century works of art were produced less frequently in Rome, and native talent seemed to be on the point of expiring. The mosaics

* Fleury, Livre XXVII., Section 35.

placed in the churches of Saints Cosmas and Damianus, St. Laurence, and St. Agnes, may be mentioned only to say that no image of the Virgin appears in them.

The chapel of St. Venantius, attached to the Baptistery of S. Giovanni in Laterano, was adorned with mosaics about the middle of the seventh century. The upper part of the apse, or tribune, is occupied by a colossal half-length figure of Christ, who has a simple aureole, and holds up His hand to bless in the Greek manner. This is a sign that Greek art had begun to have influence in Rome; and from this time all the works of sacred art which were produced in Rome may be considered to be the performances of Greek artists.

Below the figure of Christ is the Virgin of smaller size. She is without the Child, and she has her hands uplifted in prayer as an Orante. She is robed in a dress of dark blue or purple, she is hooded in a fashion approaching to that of the Madonna of later times, she wears a cross on her breast, and she has the aureole. On each side of her stand Apostles and Saints. It has been stated rather erroneously that this is the first case in which the Virgin occupies the middle place in a composition. It is more important to observe that this is the last case in which she appears in Rome as an Orante; and this example helps to convince us that such was the attitude in which she was represented in early art.

Another example of the Virgin as an Orante is given by d'Agincourt from a Syrian manuscript of

the sixth century. The scene represents the Ascension of Christ; the Virgin stands in the middle among the Apostles while Christ enters into the opening heavens.

And the position occupied by the Virgin as the central figure in these groups is not without parallel, nor must it be taken as an indication of the progress of Virgin-worship. For St. Agnes, richly dressed in the costume of the period of Honorius I., occupies the centre of the apse in her Church; St. Apollinaris as an Orante occupies the same place in the Church dedicated to him in Ravenna; and St. Euphemia in the same attitude occupied the same place in a Church which was standing two or three centuries ago.

From this time Old Rome showed few signs of activity in art for a period of many years, and the Churches were falling into decay. It was not until Charlemagne had established order in Italy that art began to revive in Rome.

CHAPTER IV.

ART DURING THE CARLOVINGIAN PERIOD.

THE accession of Pepin and Charlemagne to power was a fortunate event for the Church of Rome, which enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity, and obtained other solid advantages under the princes of this race. Able pontiffs, munificent builders and restorers of Churches, filled the Apostolic See at the same time. Art also revived for a while in Rome; for Greek artists, driven into exile by the violence of the Iconoclasts, brought their knowledge to the city of the Popes and found protection and employment there.

Adrian I. set the example of rebuilding and adorning those Churches of older times, which had already fallen into a state of dilapidation. Adrian employed architects and painters; and if, for the reconstruction of his Churches, he carried away the columns of some of the old pagan temples, he promoted them to a better use than that to which they had been destined, and he saved them from the danger of falling into hands still more unscrupulous.

Adrian rebuilt the Church of St. Pudentiana. The fine mosaic which adorns the tribune has also been ascribed to Adrian; but it is now believed with good

reason to be a part of the original Church and the work of the fifth century. It contains no representation of the Virgin.

We are informed that Adrian adorned the confession or tomb of St. Peter in the Church dedicated to that Apostle ; and that having taken away silver statues of the Saviour, of the Deipara, of Saints Peter Paul and Andrew, he replaced them with statues of gold. Adrian decorated the walls of the same Church with a painting of Christ between Michael and Gabriel, and with another representing the Virgin supported on one side by St. John and on the other by St. Andrew.

The paintings of course no longer exist. But the gifts of the Popes to the several Churches, though most of them have perished, are faithfully recorded by Anastasius in the *Liber Pontificalis* ; and his reports of the epoch of Charlemagne may in general be accepted with confidence, for he must have seen many of the gifts which he describes, and he was living when many of them were presented.

Among the gifts specified by Anastasius are coverings for the altars made of rich materials. The nature of these coverings, which Anastasius calls "vestes," must be explained. They were not what would now be called altar-cloths, that is, moveable coverings laid upon the tops of the altars and falling down the sides ; they were ornaments which covered that part of the altar which was presented to the congregation. They were made of costly materials, sometimes entirely of gold, sometimes of silk

enriched with gold and precious stones, and they were all embossed or embroidered with representations of sacred subjects. An example of such an ornament may be found in the Church of St. Ambrose in Milan, and perhaps in one or two other towns of Italy. Silk entered largely into the composition of these altar-coverings; and the terms, by which the textures were known, indicate that they were the work of Greek manufacturers. They were said to be *holoserica* and *alethina holoserica*; sometimes they had figures on them *de chrysoclavo*; and sometimes they had a *periclysis* of gold. It is reasonable to think that these ornaments came into use in Constantinople first, and that the makers of them were driven into exile with other artists. Greece was the country from which such materials and such manufactures would naturally come. For the eggs of the silkworm, which had been introduced into Greece in the time of Justinian, had been the foundation of a prosperous branch of industry, so that ornaments of silk began to be largely used in Churches.

A covering of this kind, given by Adrian, is to be especially noticed. To the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore he presented a covering of the purest gold enriched with jewels, and showing the Assumption of the Virgin, *habentem Assumptionem Dei Genitricis*. The Assumption comes into notice in the history of art for the first time in the pontificate of Adrian I. The Festival of the Assumption had lately been accepted in some few places in the West, though not without hesitation and doubt. This, therefore, is

precisely the time at which we should expect that the Assumption would make its appearance in art ; and the coincidence justifies our expectations. It will be necessary to return to the subject hereafter.

Leo III. succeeded Adrian, and followed his example as a restorer of Churches. To one Church he gave an altar-covering representing the Crucifixion and the Resurrection ; to another he gave a similar gift showing the history of the Nativity of our Lord and of the Presentation in the temple. To Santa Maria Maggiore he gave one embellished with the Resurrection, and another to the same church having on it the Annunciation, with the figures of Joachim and Anna. This is the first mention of the parents of the Virgin Mary in sacred art, and it proves that the pedigree, or the supposed pedigree, of the Virgin had already obtained recognition from the Church. The Immaculate Conception was very far from the thoughts of those who first represented in art the simple idea of the Virgin's genealogy, and there could have been no great harm in recording that the parents of the Virgin were of the common race of mankind, whatever their names might have been.

Another gift of Leo to the same Church was a covering for the altar embellished with a representation of the departure of the Virgin from this life, or the transitus of the Virgin, as Anastasius in this instance calls it. That which was here represented was perhaps the death of Mary and her spirit passing into the hands of Christ. But it is not possible to know how the subject was treated.

The Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus, which was restored in the time of Leo, contains some interesting mosaics, which seem unfortunately to have been decayed and mended with painting. The Transfiguration of our Lord fills the apse, or tribune. On one side of this group is the Annunciation, on the other are the Virgin and Child with an Angel.

The Annunciation is very interesting, because it is the earliest example extant of that treatment, which was then becoming, and for a long time continued to be, the conventional treatment of the subject. Among the older mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore there is an 'Annunciation, as it has been stated. But that was an early effort, the work of an artist who was not able to master the subject and to seize the best moment of time. In that early attempt Gabriel is seen flying down from heaven with the tidings. But in the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus Gabriel is seen in discourse with the Virgin, and in the act of delivering to her that important message which he was sent to convey. It is necessary to pay particular attention to this example of a subject which has made so great a figure in the art of later ages. We have but few examples of early art to confront with the multitude of pictures which have been painted in more corrupt times. Every ancient work of sacred art must be considered as the type of a class, as the representative of many similar works which have perished.

Gabriel stands on the left hand of the spectator, and that has always continued to be his place. He

stands with folded wings, as if he had reached the end of his journey from the sky, and was proceeding with deliberation to execute his important mission. He stands, as he stands in the presence of God, to announce to Mary the approaching birth of the Son of God. He wears bright garments. He carries nothing in his hand; he presents no emblematical white lily like the Gabriels who are painted according to the feeble imagination of later times. But, raising his right hand, he makes the sign of the benediction in the Latin manner with the thumb and two fingers, as if he was pronouncing the words, **BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.** No exposition of Scripture could be more faithful to the text than that which the artist has expressed by form and colour in this treatment of Gabriel. The work of the artist and the verses in St. Luke may be compared, and no discrepancy will be found between them. This treatment of Gabriel was the rule which was followed by painters for many ages, until it was altered for the worse by the corrupt devices of more modern art.

The Virgin Mary stands before the chair from which she seems to have risen in her surprise. She seems attentive to the words of Gabriel. She is attired in a dress of brown, with a hood of the same colour drawn over her head, and around her head she has the aureole. The dress is of a character perfectly religious, very different from that which is worn by the Virgin in the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, very different from that in which St. Agnes and

other female Saints appear in the various Churches in Rome. It seems to have been felt that the secular dress, with its modish air and its trinkets, did not suit the Virgin Mary, whose sanctity was not like the changing fashion of the day. The mind of the Church was not content with the taste which had prevailed hitherto. A movement was made to change the treatment, and to give to the representations of the Virgin a character entirely religious. And in this example we see the Virgin Mary clothed in the dress of a nun. The dress is the same in form and in colour as that which would have been worn in the nunneries of Constantinople, and perhaps in all the nunneries throughout the Christian world in the time of Charlemagne. Examples of the same dress may be seen in other works of Greek art which exist.

There is something to be said in favour of the new style of dress and something to be said against it. This mode of attire suggested ideas of monastic rules, of submission to authority, and of a penitential life. It carried with it not the idea of religion merely, but that of austerity, of seclusion, and of indifference to the world, an idea which scarcely corresponds with the sentiments of the Magnificat. This change of treatment in art was something like that change of feeling with which individuals have suddenly abandoned the rights of citizenship and the luxuries of the world, and devoted themselves to the mortifications of the cloister. The secular idea was completely dropped, but the mind of the artist rushed too

precipitately into the monastic idea. The reaction was too violent, and it seemed likely to lead to error on the side of rigour and severity. Still there was some advantage in this attempt, as being a correction of that taste which would clothe the Virgin with pomps and vanities. It was a seasonable attempt to counteract the spirit which assigned to the Virgin too much of the glory of the world. The mosaic now under consideration belongs to a severe school of art, and it marks a time of struggle between the religious and the secular ideas. Art had not yet succeeded in forming the type or model which was required; but every experiment that was made is an interesting step in the progress of Virgin-painting.

The corresponding group of the Virgin and Child needs no remark except this, that the Virgin Mary is there habited exactly as in the Annunciation.

After the short pontificate of Stephen IV., Paschal I. succeeded in the year 817 to the Papal chair. Paschal was not behind any in zeal as a restorer of Churches, for those of St. Praxedes, St. Cecilia, and Santa Maria in Domnica, as it is corruptly called, were completely rebuilt by him and adorned with mosaics.

The Church of St. Praxedes has been made resplendent in modern times with marble and gilding, which have much changed its character. But the mosaics have received only the necessary repairs, and they are in a fair state of preservation, though as works of art they are inferior to the works of earlier and of later centuries.

In the apse or tribune Christ is the most conspicuous figure. He has the cruciform aureole about His head, He is dressed in golden or saffron robes, and He is represented much larger in size than the Saints who stand by Him. He holds out His hand, but not in the action of blessing. His hair and beard are nearly black, for the portrait, which is now so familiar to us, had not then been brought to perfection. Three Saints stand on each side of Him; among them are the two sisters Praxedes and Pudentiana, gaily dressed as Roman ladies in the costume of the ninth century, and Paschal himself, who holds the model of the Church in his hand.

On the triumphal arch are the heavenly Jerusalem, the four-and-twenty elders, and other subjects taken from the Book of Revelation.

The Virgin Mary does not appear in this Church; but in the annexed Chapel of St. Zeno, which seems to belong to a later period, she is seen on a smaller scale, holding the Child, and attended by the two sisters. She wears a mantle or religious habit without any ornament, and a hood over her head, and near her are the letters *MP ΘT*. The Child holds up His right hand to bless according to the Latin manner, and in the other hand He holds a scroll on which are the words: *Ego sum Lux*. The two sisters also wear dresses of a religious character, which had begun to be the distinguishing mark of female Saints.

Another Church of Paschal is that of St. Cecilia. The principal mosaic in this Church is the group of

figures in the apse. Christ is conspicuous as central figure. He is represented larger than life golden robes, and with cruciform aureole, and holds up His hand to give the blessing according to the Greek usage. Around Him are Saints, Celestials, and others, and Paschal himself is there present the model of his Church.

High up on the triumphal arch there is a group of the Virgin and Child. The Child wears a crown. The Virgin wears a mantle and hood; over her head is a crown, and around her head the aureole. The hood and crown together are a remarkable combination of the religious and secular ideas. Ten virgins who are also crowned, attend upon the Virgin and Child, and below them are the twenty-four elders holding garlands in their hands.

The third Church of Paschal is dedicated to the Virgin, and is called Santa Maria in Domnica; here, if anywhere, we should expect to see every effort made by the art of the period to give distinction to the Virgin.

On the arch above the tribune is Christ with a group of other figures. The place of dignity was reserved for the Virgin and Child, who occupy the center of the tribune. The Virgin sits on a throne, garlanded and without crown. She is dressed in her usual robes of blue, or purple inclining to blue, marked with small golden crosses, and shaped in a fashion more religious than secular. The Christ who is dressed in gold, blesses in the Latin manner. A company of winged Angels stand about them

each side, and Paschal himself, in the attitude of adoration, holds the Virgin's foot.

This mosaic must be accepted as an interesting example of the sentiment of the age, and it affords a good opportunity to enter into a critical examination of the task which the painter of the time had to perform.

Much has been said in disparagement of this mosaic, as if it was a clear proof of rapidly advancing Virgin-worship. It is true that Paschal prostrate at the feet of the Virgin is a case hitherto without example, and that is the most censurable part of the picture. But there is something more to be seen in this work than signs of advancing Virgin-worship. Something may be said in favour of the work as being a step in the right direction, an improvement in the art-treatment of the Virgin, an attempt to devise a better conventional type.

The object of the artist was to find out some mode of imparting greatness to the portrait of the Virgin, which should be spiritual rather than temporal greatness. And the artist was successful in some points if he failed in others.

The case deserves careful consideration. In the rich language of Scripture images of earthly things had been used abundantly to signify the righteousness and the reward of the Saints. These images may be used with good effect in the elevated style of poetical description. Rainbows, thrones, crowns, precious stones, white garments, trees of life, and the heavenly Jerusalem, are beautiful images when

used as figures of that which is invisible. It is understood that they have a meaning beyond anything that we can realise, and that they are not to be measured by the rule of human experience. They stand as signs of glory and happiness inexpressibly great. They suggest to the mind ideas beyond those which the finest productions of nature can supply. But when these images of the sacred writers are taken literally, and translated into painting, and made visible by the artist as material objects within the narrow compass of a few feet of wall, then they lose their figurative nature, and at the same time they lose all their moral force and beauty.

To give a spiritual character to his work was the difficult task which the Christian artist had to accomplish. In this respect the artist laboured under greater disadvantages than the writer or the preacher. Christian art had to learn what it could do, and what was beyond its power. Art can paint the sublime and beautiful so long as a simple idea is presented to the eye. But art cannot paint metaphor. A metaphor is a combination of ideas, which can be received into the mind together, though they cannot be brought together before the eye in one picture. No artist can paint the oil of gladness, or a ray of hope, or a sea of troubles, or the winter of our discontent. "A crown of righteousness which fades not away" is a beautiful image for the poet and the orator; but the art of the painter, which cannot connect the ideas of righteousness and immortality with flowers and leaves, can give us nothing but the picture of an

ordinary chaplet of flowers and leaves that wither. The poet can use figures of speech which the painter cannot express in form and colour. And, when celestial glory is put upon canvas in the shape of crowns, jewels, and gorgeous robes, that which we behold is no longer spiritual glory, it is a feeble copy of the glory which passes away.

This will be better understood from a consideration of the parables of our Lord. And first it is necessary to give a definition of the word. A parable is not itself a figure of speech, but it is an indirect mode of instruction involving figures of speech, it is a discourse in which doctrine is taught by means of allusion to familiar things. Parables are of two kinds; those which contain simile or metaphor, and those which contain allegory. In the former kind the sentiment or moral lesson is treated figuratively, in the latter the person is figurative. There is an essential difference between these two kinds of parable, a difference which makes itself felt when the painter tries his art upon them. It is easy to represent the allegorical parable in painting, impossible to represent the metaphorical.

The metaphorical parable or the simile is no subject for the painter, because the resemblance is perceived by the mind and not by the eye. The censorious man with the beam in his own eye, when the attempt is made to paint him, becomes caricature. And in like manner the pearl of great price, the wheat and the tares, the sower and the seed, the barren fig-tree, the house swept and garnished, the strait gate,

the net cast into the sea, the candle under a bushel, are no subjects for art. These parables are of a metaphorical nature; they speak of the invisible gifts of God or of the invisible corruptions of men. They convey a sense to the mind very different from the image which is brought before the eye; and when they are accepted literally all the spirit or moral part of them is lost. To accept these parables literally is to be blind to the real meaning which they convey, and to paint them is to accept them literally.

But on the other hand, the allegorical parable is quite as effective in painting as in oratory. The Good Shepherd is as fit a subject for the painter as for the preacher, because the person only is figurative, while the watchful care and tenderness, which are the moral qualities to be shown, can be expressed perfectly well in painting. The Prodigal Son, too, is a fit subject for a picture of the highest art, as they know who have seen the fine paintings of that subject by Murillo, Guercino, and others; for the repentance or moral part of the parable is effectively shown, and the spirit of the parable is preserved in the picture, although the persons are figurative. The Good Samaritan can be treated effectively in art, for the lesson which the parable teaches by an allegory is applicable to every one *mutato nomine*. And the Pharisee and Publican explain themselves as well in painting as in language, because the actions which denote the pride of the one and the contrition of the other can be expressed as well by form and colour as by words. The sacrifice of Isaac, understood

allegorically as a figure of the Great Sacrifice, has just the same force in painting as in history.

Some few parables are of a mixed kind, and contain in them both metaphor and allegory, and therefore the truths which are conveyed by them can be only partially expressed by the painter. The lamps and the wedding-garment, so far as they symbolise spiritual graces, are beyond the province of art. Yet the ten virgins, so far as they show themselves in an attitude of vigilance or negligence, and the man without the wedding-garment, so far as he commits an intelligible act of presumptuousness, are allegorical, and they may be made the subjects of pictures.

From these considerations it will be seen that the painter cannot paint all that he finds in Scripture. Art fails when it borrows the riches and grandeur of the world as images of the righteousness of the Saints. The picture of a handsomely dressed person does not convey the idea of a spirit clothed with righteousness.

To find the proper mode of expressing spiritual grandeur was the task in which art was labouring, though as yet with only partial success. The spiritual signification of jewels and bright clothing was the thing to be painted, not the jewels themselves. Art had no easy work. It had the task of shaking off the earthly element, and of causing something of the heavenly element to appear in the human form. The difficulty was to give glory to the Mother and Child, and yet to raise them above the common glory of the

world, and to clothe them with a glorious fashion of their own.

The artist who executed the mosaic in the Church of Paschal seems to have felt this, and his intention seems to show itself in his work. The Madonna is richly dressed, but not according to the fashion of the times. Care was taken to reject those ornaments which seem rather to be the sign of a proud heart, and to choose that form of apparel which might rather denote the "meek and quiet spirit." A step was certainly gained in this attempt. This portrait of the Virgin, though not so professedly religious as that which appears in the Annunciation in the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus, is less worldly than some which may be seen. There is something to praise in the expression of the face and in the air of the figure. There is not much to blame in the dress. The attendant personages which fill up the scene are such as may be considered appropriate, for a choir of the heavenly host stand around the throne.

But for one fault the Christian of any period might have looked at this picture of the Virgin and Child with satisfaction. Unfortunately, Paschal has caused himself to be seen prostrate before the throne, which is the greatest blemish in the composition.


In earlier times a custom had grown up of introducing the portrait of the founder of the Church among the sacred group which filled the tribune. Honorius, who is represented in his Church of St. Agnes by the side of the Saint, is an instance of this; Pelagius is for the same reason introduced into

the mosaics of the Church of St. Laurence; and Paschal himself stands among the Saints in his other Churches of St. Praxedes and St. Cecilia. It was not in accordance with good taste and sound judgment, even from the beginning, to permit the living and the departed thus to be brought together into one company. Such a practice might have helped to create a lively idea of the Communion of Saints, which is an article of the Creed; yet the Creed at the same time makes a clear distinction between the quick and the dead. And this case of Paschal before the Virgin strongly shows the inconvenience of bringing together the inhabitants of heaven and earth in one view, except in those cases for which there is scriptural authority. Although a living man might, without much danger to the doctrine and discipline of the Church, be seen standing by the side of Apostles and departed Saints, he could not reverently stand among the choir of Angels, who surrounded the throne of the Mother and Child. There was indeed only one becoming attitude for Paschal, if he appeared at all, and that was the attitude of adoration. He must either have been left out entirely, which would have been the proper thing, or he must have been painted in the posture of a worshipper. He chose the latter of these two parts, and he set an example which has been imitated in later times even to a high degree of absurdity. Paschal seemed to have acquired the right, according to the custom then prevailing, to place his own likeness on the wall of the Church which he had built. But

Paschal pressed his right too far, and he put himself in a false position. Paschal made such offerings to God and the Church, that he would have deserved to live in the remembrance of posterity, even if he had not been seen grasping the slipper of the Virgin. His vanity has been imitated more than his piety. Since his time many have been so represented at the feet of the Virgin Mary, of whom it cannot be said that they had built beautiful temples for the service of religion.

Besides the Churches which Paschal rebuilt and decorated, other offerings, which have perished, are recorded as having been placed in Churches by him. Among his gifts the following is worthy of note. He gave to the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore a covering for the altar, showing the Assumption of the Virgin. There has been occasion already to mention the Assumption in connexion with the names of Adrian and Leo. The Assumption is now mentioned for the third time, showing that artists were beginning to treat it as a fit subject for their pencils, and that the public mind was beginning to be familiar with it in the decorations of the Church. Anastasius, speaking of this gift of Paschal, says : "*Beatissimus et venerabilis prænominatus pontifex, divino amore ductus, fecit in jam præfato altari vestem similiter de chrysoclavo, habentem historiam qualiter Beata Dei Genitrix corpore est assumpta, cum periclysi de chrysoclavo seu diversis margaritis comptam atque decoratam.*"

These are the first attempts of the artist on a subject which became in latter centuries so great a feast




for the schools of art. We are familiar to satiety with the subject as treated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and we are accustomed to connect the idea of the Assumption with the brilliant pictures of Guido and Murillo. But let no one rush to the conclusion that the Assumption, as the Western Church in the time of Paschal timidly began to call it, was then the same thing as the Assumption which Guido and his contemporaries delighted to paint. The early Church knew nothing of the Virgin raised to life after death and wafted to heaven amidst a glory of Angels. There is no very early example of the subject remaining, nor any precise information to show how the subject was treated at first. Anastasius speaks of the Assumption of the Virgin "in the body." If these words are genuine, yet Anastasius does not say to what place the Virgin was conveyed, or whether alive or dead, and these are important points. For the present, it is sufficient to record the fact that the Assumption has given employment to the painter's hand. But, if the subject has begun to make a figure in art, then we are sure that the doctrine has been brought before the attention of the Church. For, according to invariable experience, every doctrine, which comes prominently into notice, soon finds an artist to make it the subject of a picture.

Rome possesses an interesting mosaic in the Church of Santa Maria Nuova, which was dedicated to the Virgin by Leo IV. in the year 849. The Virgin and Child, in figures of large size, occupy the central place in the tribune. The Virgin sits on a

magnificent throne, and she is arrayed in robes of rich imperial purple. Her dress is edged with gold lace, and spangled with golden crosses. She is without hood, and for a head-dress she wears a double crown enriched with jewels. She is girt around with a thick cord or rope of twisted gold, which is tied in front and shows the ends terminated with large golden tassels. With her left hand she supports the Child, who stands upon her knee dressed in clothing of gold. The hand of God is over them. On the right hand of the throne stand John and James, and on the left Peter and Andrew, all dressed in white garments, and holding scrolls in their hands.

This mosaic is upon the whole grand and imposing, although it is not of the highest quality as a work of art. The figure of the Virgin is full of dignity as she sits upon her throne.

There is much less of the religious and much more of the imperial sentiment in this mosaic than in that which may be seen in Santa Maria in Domnica. For while on the one hand we see the golden crown, the imperial robes, and the golden girdle, we miss the hooded Virgin and the hand of the Child held up to bless. With the exception of the golden crosses scattered profusely over the robes of purple, there is nothing to mark the religious character of the subject. In short, the imperial idea here triumphs. The ideas of the glory and honour of the Virgin are all borrowed from the palace of Constantinople, and to represent her with the attributes of an empress was the highest aim of the artist. The crown, the



throne, and the dress of an empress, were the nearest approach to spiritual glory which the artist desired to imagine. This design is the reverse of that which is seen in the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus, where the Virgin in the Annunciation wears the grave and simple dress of a nun. The two compositions are typical of two distinct schools—the religious and the secular, the one taking its model from the monastery, the other from the palace.

Perhaps there may be a reason in the circumstances of the day why the Virgin of the Church of Leo IV. shows so much of the imperial style. This mosaic was made seven years after the Feast of Orthodoxy had been kept in Constantinople. The Empress Theodora, who then celebrated the restoration of pictures to the Churches, was held in the highest honour. Her pious character and her imperial dignity were praised equally by the theologians and the courtiers of the times. When the Virgin was represented as arrayed in imperial robes, a compliment was paid to the Empress. It is not difficult to believe that, when we look at the picture of the Virgin in Santa Maria Nuova, we really see an accurate copy of the dress and ornaments worn at the court of Constantinople by Theodora herself.

The last mosaic of this period, which it will be necessary to notice, is in the Cathedral of Capua, and was executed about the year 900. Here the Virgin is seen in the principal place, holding the Child and attended by Saints. She is richly dressed. She wears a hood, and over the hood she wears a

crown. She has the aureole around her head, which attribute indeed is never omitted. Under her are the letters *MP ΘT*. The Child gives the blessing according to the Latin form, and in His left hand He holds a sceptre similar to those which may be seen on the coins of the Greek empire.

This work, which was executed under the Lombard princes of Capua, shows much of the religious sentiment mixed with much of the grandeur of the palace. It was done by Greek artists like all other works of this period; for the Lombards had as yet no native artists, and Capua had easy communication with the East through Naples and Amalfi. Artists had not yet arrived at that happy conventional type, which gives to the Virgin a religious character raised above the common walks of life, and borrowing little from the fashions of the world which passes away. It was not easy to paint the Virgin with all her moral attributes shown in her portrait, and to express attributes which seemed to men almost inconsistent with each other. The difficulty was to represent in art that portrait of the Virgin which is expressed in the poetry of the Magnificat; a difficulty which can never be surmounted until art has learnt to paint the devout humility of the Virgin combined with a consciousness of high destiny. Lowliness and dignity, simplicity and refinement, love of retirement and obedience to a high calling, have never been perfectly represented in combination except in the Magnificat. In the schools of Constantinople, however, that conventional type of the Virgin Mary, which has never

been surpassed, was advancing nearer to its completion.

Leo IV. was the last pontiff who contributed much to the promotion of sacred art in Rome before the age of total darkness set in. The Romans began to suffer in their very homes from the invasions of the Mahometans. The Saracens, who had become the scourge of the Mediterranean, pushed their incursions even into Rome, and it was much for Leo to replace in some measure the gold and silver ornaments of the Churches which had been carried away by the invaders.

The unfortunate separation of the Eastern and Western Churches was a damage to both, but especially to the latter. It put an end to all hope of the revival of learning, and to all possibility of intercourse among learned men. It put an end to the influence of Greek art in Italy, and to many ancient Catholic traditions at the same time.

And, what was worse, domestic evils of a scandalous nature soon after completed the degradation of Rome. Vice got possession of high places and governed Rome in Church and State. The age, which could tolerate Theodora and Marozia, could not be expected to distinguish itself by a love of sacred art.

The patience of those parts of the Christian world which were in connexion with Rome was put to a sore trial. The Emperor Otho I. interfered with a high hand; and from that time for a century to come the little that can be praised in Rome was done by

the German power. German influence did something for the respectability of the Apostolic See, but it brought no taste for poetry or painting into the city of Rome. When Gerbert came to Rome as Sylvester II., piety and learning came with him, but not the fine arts. Conscience may be awakened as soon as the reformer comes; but to create a school of art is the work of more than one generation.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN.

THE history of sacred art in Italy might have been broken off at the middle of the ninth century to be recommenced from the time of the revival of painting in Tuscany. In Venice and Pisa, and perhaps in other sea-port towns, there was still some activity, with the aid of the Greeks, in building and in decorative art. It might have been said, however, that the art of painting was extinct in Italy, unless some curious attempts of the Lombards had existed to represent the Italian art of the darkest ages. Beneath the floor of the Church of St. Clement, which is considered to be one of the most interesting churches in Rome, an older Church was accidentally discovered a few years ago. This subterranean Church, after having remained buried and forgotten for many centuries, has been partially cleared of the earth which filled it. The ancient columns and walls have been uncovered, and on the walls ancient paintings have been found. These paintings, which are in a tolerably fair state of preservation, have been submitted to the criticism of the nineteenth century.

The paintings, which are done in fresco, were all executed probably at the same period, with the ex-

ception of two or three, which are older than the rest. Some of them represent our Lord with Saints and Angels, some represent legendary miracles of the dark ages, very few of them have reference to the Virgin Mary. One picture, however, in which the Virgin Mary is introduced, is the only ancient example of its kind, for it is a picture of the Assumption of the Virgin.

It is necessary to describe this singular picture. The Virgin appears ascending bodily out of the tomb. The artist has not represented the death or sleep of the Virgin: he has not shown her spirit received into the hands of Christ while her body remains dead upon the cross. That would have been the Greek mode of treatment. Here she is seen alive with body and spirit joined together.

She rises out of a tomb hewn in the living rock, around which the Apostles have been gathered as witnesses of the Assumption. The death and burial of the Virgin, at which, according to the legend, the Apostles were present, are supposed to be past. She is raised again from the dead and taken to the sky.

She rises from the tomb apparently by the force of her own nature and without help. She is not transported silently and unconsciously, as some of the early legends would perhaps have represented her, and as in some later pictures she has been painted. She is not carried away to an unknown place of burial. She rises a living body possessing the power of motion. She is visible to the Apostles, and she mounts

upwards, while Christ is seen in the opening heaven above with a company of Angels ready to receive her. That which the artist has painted is not in fact an Assumption, it is an Ascension. It is nothing like the departure of a Christian out of the world, it is like the exaltation of our Lord Himself to His throne in the heavens. The subject, as treated in this picture, is an acceptance on the part of the painter of stories, which have never yet been accepted formally by any Church. Pope Leo, with his name written near him, is introduced on one side of the group of Apostles, and St. Vitus on the other side, with his name also written.

It is very important to determine the age to which this painting belongs. It is admitted that the Church or crypt itself is very ancient, perhaps as old as Constantine, perhaps older. But that circumstance proves nothing with regard to the age of the picture.

It is necessary in the first place to consider the rise and progress of the legends concerning the death of Mary, for these may be known with sufficient accuracy.

The early Christians, intent upon things essential to the faith, did not care to inquire into matters which Apostles and Evangelists had left untouched. The sentiments of the Church towards the Virgin were those of profound respect and admiration, without any desire to search curiously into the circumstances of her departure out of the world. But when the appetite of succeeding generations began to crave for the relics of Saints and Martyrs, and when

stories of miracles wrought by relics began to be put in circulation, then inquiries were made concerning the place where the remains of the Virgin had been laid. There seemed to be no reason why they should not reveal themselves, as those of other Saints had done, by some exhibition of miraculous power.

A story was current in the middle ages that the Empress Pulcheria requested the Patriarch of Jerusalem to send the relics of the Virgin to Constantinople. Whether it be true or not true that Pulcheria made this request, the story serves at least to throw light upon the opinions held in early times on this matter. They who invented the story, if it was untrue, must have believed that Pulcheria knew nothing of the Assumption of the Virgin in the body, or she never would have asked for the relics. And they must have thought moreover that such a request would not have been contrary to sound doctrine in the time of Pulcheria, for no one would have imputed heretical opinions to the pious Empress in whose reign the fourth General Council was held. The story, whether true or false, amounts to a confession that the Assumption of the Virgin was not known in the earliest ages.

Happily the conscience of the Church was against the desires and expectations of the relic-seekers and relic-finders. Happily the Christian people were saved from the pain and horror of hearing that the remains of the Virgin had been found, and disinterred, and distributed in small parcels among the various lands of Christendom. No one announced

himself as the discoverer of the remains of the Virgin. It was concluded that they had been deposited in some unknown place, and all search for them was discouraged by the Church.

No one pretended to have found the remains. Yet on the other hand persons came forward with pretended revelations concerning the death of the Virgin and the removal of her remains, and forgeries were written on the subject. But the Church gave no credit to these apocryphal stories.

Baronius laments the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence upon which the Assumption of the Virgin rests. He observes that it is matter of astonishment that the history of so great an event should have been so passed over by inspired writers as to make it necessary for us to seek information, not from authentic records, but from revelations imparted to undistinguished persons. He remarks farther that there is a wonderful discrepancy in the statements of those who came forward with revelations. He consoles himself, however, with this reflection, that, if in the earlier centuries the glory of the last days of Mary was obscured with clouds, it increased in brilliance as time advanced.

The terms, which were used by the Church in speaking of the departure of the Virgin, were in early times exceedingly moderate and carefully chosen. The Latins called it *Dormitio* or the falling asleep of the Virgin; the Greeks called it *Κόλμησις*. These terms, which are of the same import, conveyed no idea of anything out of the usual course of nature;

for *Κοίμησις* meant the sleep of any Christian. Indeed the tomb itself appears to have been called a sleep; for example, a monumental stone has been found at Syracuse, having on it the inscription *Κοίμησις Θεοδότου*, where the word seems to be equivalent to cemetery. In short, the same scriptural word was used in speaking of the death of the Virgin as would have been used in the case of any Christian.

The word Assumption worked its way gradually into use in the Latin Church. St. Boniface, the Anglo-Saxon Apostle of Germany, who died in the year 755, mentions the Assumption in a list of Festivals observed at Mayence. But the observance of the day was then far from being general, and doubts existed among the Franks as to the expediency of accepting the Festival. A list of Festivals, issued in accordance with the Capitularies of Charlemagne, ends with this remark: We leave the Assumption of Blessed Mary for farther inquiry.

It was perhaps during this period of uncertainty that Usuard wrote his martyrology. He speaks of the *Dormitio* or falling asleep of St. Mary the Mother of God, still preferring to use the older term. He says that although her body is not "found" on earth, yet venerable Mother Church so celebrates the venerable memory of her, as to have no doubt that she "*migrasse pro conditione carnis*," departed this life according to the law to which flesh is subject. But as to the question what had become of the venerable temple of the Holy Ghost, the sobriety

of the Church, he adds, chose rather to know nothing than to weave a web of frivolous and apocryphal doctrine.*

Ado, Archbishop of Vienne, who wrote about fifty years later than Usuard, follows in his steps. He says that the whole Church celebrates on the eighteenth day of the Calends of September the Dormition of Mary the Mother of God, whose body, like that of Moses, is not "found" upon earth. The Church, he says, is content with what is written in Scripture; for the testimonies of the Evangelists are sufficient to commend to us the sanctity and the manner of life of the Virgin, nor does it seem necessary to seek farther.†

There was a manifest unwillingness in the Frankish Church of that day to come to any more precise decision. Usuard and Ado shrank from making unwarranted assertions. They limited their doctrine concerning the Assumption of the Virgin to these safe and inoffensive statements, that the body of the Virgin Mary was not found, and that the Church had no knowledge concerning it. They showed a desire to resist the introduction of apocryphal legends into the doctrine of the Church. There was nothing said in Scripture, there was nothing known from history, concerning the last days of the Virgin Mary. Whatever may have been the imagination of painters in later times, the Church of Charlemagne went not beyond

* Thomassin, *Traité des Fêtes de l'Église*, Livre II. ch. 20.

† Ibid.

the simplicity of Scripture. The Festival of the Assumption was accepted on this understanding. We are left to conclude that God disposed of the Virgin according to His own infinite goodness and wisdom. The Virgin Mary departed this life; and doubtless the providence of God ordered all the rest. This is an open verdict; and this is all that Usuard and Ado meant, when they spoke of the Assumption, or the Dormition as they preferred to call it, of the Virgin.

The subject began in the time of Charlemagne to give employment to the painter. The gifts of Adrian, Leo, and Paschal, which have been mentioned, were presented to the Churches just about the time when Usuard was writing on the subject. We have no information as to the mode in which the Assumption was treated by the first artists who painted it. It would be satisfactory to think that artists painted with the prudent reserve of the writers who have been quoted. The artists who wrought in Rome in the days of Charlemagne were Greeks, and it is reasonable to think that in their compositions they would not depart widely from their own traditions.

With a knowledge of these things we proceed to a criticism of the picture in the crypt of St. Clement.

When the crypt was first opened a strong attempt was made by partisans of Rome, more zealous than critical, to push back the age of the picture to the earliest Christian times, so as to obtain, if not Apostolic, at least primitive sanction for the doctrine which it illustrates. A glance at the painting is

sufficient to convince those who have any knowledge of Christian antiquities that such an attempt was hopeless.

Wiser critics assigned to the painting the more reasonable age of the ninth century, and supposed Leo to be Leo IV. But there are many objections to be made to the opinion of these critics. According to their ideas this picture would be of the same age as the Virgin and Child of Leo in Santa Maria Nuova, a thing scarcely credible to those who compare them. Concerning the name of Leo, which is clearly written on the picture, there is no dispute. Two or three indistinct letters, which follow the name, have been supposed to be RT or QRT, and they have been understood to be part of the word Quartus. But, whatever the letters may be, this conjecture is inadmissible. The ordinal numbers when they are set after names are always written with Roman numerals, and there is no example of the ordinal number written as a word either at full length or abbreviated. Besides, the Popes had not begun in the time of Leo IV. to take the ordinal numbers after their names. It was not customary even with the Greek Emperors to distinguish themselves from their predecessors of the same name by taking the ordinal number, as the coins of the Lower Empire sufficiently prove. The arguments therefore of those, who attribute this picture to the time of Leo IV. and to the middle of the ninth century, fall to the ground.

The painting has peculiarities of its own. It is

painted according to ideas different from those of the Greek school. The subject is not treated as it would have been treated by Greeks in design, or in sentiment, or in colouring. The picture seems to be the work of a self-taught artist, of one who had not studied in the older schools of art, nor profited by the experience of others. The Virgin has a robe of dull red and a white mantle thrown over it, and she has no hood.

The presence of St. Vitus in the picture may perhaps furnish the best clue to the real age of it. His name is commemorated on the fifteenth of June in the Roman calendar; and in the Breviary an imaginary biography has been written of him, which represents him to be a martyr of the time of Diocletian. His name, however, does not appear in the Menologium of Basil II., where every Saint of the Greek and Latin Churches before the schism may be found. Vitus then, whoever he was, became a Saint of the Latin Church after the time of Photius.

St. Vitus appears in another picture in the same subterranean Church. These pictures were without doubt painted at the same time, and that was the time at which the Saint was at the height of his reputation; for he never appeared in painting either before or after that time.

The name of St. Vitus is also known in geography, and by means of the evidence afforded by the maps it may be possible to trace him to his home. Two places in Apulia, which the Normans had conquered

from the Greeks, and a promontory near Mount Eryx in Sicily, which the Normans had conquered from the Saracens, were called by them after the name of the Saint ; and those conquests were made in the latter half of the eleventh century. The Normans must have learnt the name of the Saint in Italy, for they certainly did not carry the knowledge of it with them from France. Two places in the hilly country near Rome received the same name through Papal influence. Ten places of the like name in Upper Italy, most of them on the eastern side of the Lake of Garda, may be counted on a good map, and four more may be counted when the Austrian frontier is crossed.

And now we have ascertained facts enough to serve as the foundation of a reasonable inference. It is certain that Vitus was held in high estimation about the time of the Norman conquests in Italy and Sicily, and that he was not an Eastern Saint, nor a Saint of the Western Church before the year 879. It seems almost certain that he was a Saint, real or fictitious, of Upper Italy or Lombardy, who was brought into notice by his fellow-countrymen the Lombards, when they had acquired power and influence in the Church, and it may be concluded that Vitus is the Latinised form of a Lombard name. For the Lombards, though they had ceased to be a power since the time when Charlemagne deposed their last king, had not ceased to be an active enterprising race. All the future strength and prosperity of Italy depended upon them ; all the genius,

which in later times made Italy famous, was then latent in them. These were the only men of energy among the vicious and feeble Italians of the middle ages. They cultivated various branches of learning with success; they excelled in architecture, and began to build leaning towers; they made attempts in painting. The names of those who first rose to distinction in Italy, when the dark period was passing away, denote them to have been Lombards. Aribert Archbishop of Milan, Anselm afterwards Alexander II., Lanfranc and Anselm Archbishops of Canterbury, Gualberto or Walpert and Romuald the founders of monastic orders, all those who bore the name of Guido, Hildebrand himself, and St. Francis whose name was Giovanni Bernardone, were men of Lombard blood, and they were born in those parts of Italy which in later times produced the poets and the painters.

Guido in fact, or Wido as it was written in the original Teutonic, is the same name as Vitus. Guido is a name of very frequent occurrence in the history of Italy during the middle ages. Guido Duke of Spoleto made himself king of Italy; Guido Marquis of Tuscany was one of the husbands of Marozia; Guido of Arezzo was the improver of music; Guido was the name of the father of Francesca di Rimini; Guido Cavalcanti was the friend of Dante; and many other Guidi are mentioned in history. All these may be considered to have borne the favourite old name of Wido or Vitus.

From these arguments it will seem highly pro-

bable, or indeed quite clear, that Vitus was a Lombard Saint, who was brought into notoriety in Italy precisely at the time when Hildebrand and the Lombards began to have influence in Rome. If the life of the Saint had been written at that time, we should probably have been told that he was a holy Lombard, who did miracles on the banks of the Lake of Garda after the conversion of his race from Arianism. It is hard to imagine what motive the Lombard Italians could have had in calling so many places after him, unless he had been a favourite Saint of their own race. If we believe the Saint to have been a Lombard, it is easy to understand why Lombard ecclesiastics, with Hildebrand at their head, should have desired to press his claims upon the attention of the Italians in general.

We may therefore conclude that the Leo, who is introduced into the picture, is the ninth of that name, previously known as Bruno Bishop of Toul, and that the picture was painted very nearly about the year 1050 by a Lombard.

As this is the first example that we find in painting of the Virgin coming to life again and rising bodily into the air, it was important to determine the age of the picture. And the arguments which have been adduced have shown not only the time at which the picture was most probably painted, but also the influence to which it was due. It is not possible to say for certain that the idea of the Virgin floating in the air at her Assumption was of Lombard origin; but it was in all probability due to the

influence of Hildebrand that this painting was executed in the old Church of St. Clement. Perhaps this mode of treatment was not at that time very prevalent in Italy. It gave way to the more orthodox tradition of the Greeks, when art revived in Italy under Greek teachers. But it recovered itself at a later period, it gained the ascendancy, and triumphed in the superb Assumptions of Titian, the Caracci, Guido, and others.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ICONOCLASTS.

WAR, crusade, and revolution, have destroyed those monuments which once bore witness to the piety of Constantinople. We have to seek in other lands for the few remaining works of the Greek artists of the middle ages. We have to collect our information concerning Greek art from the occasional remarks which have been noted down on the page of history. It is necessary, however, to make ourselves acquainted with all that can be known of Byzantine art, so that we may perceive its effects on modern art, and understand the loss which the Christian world has sustained in the ruin of Constantinople as a Christian city.

Constantine took care of the interests of religion in the city which he built; and Constantinople may be said to have risen as a Christian city from its very foundations. For, though paganism was still the religion of the State, Christianity was protected by the Emperor; and, if the statue of Apollo was set up in the new city, so was that of the Good Shepherd. The three celebrated Churches, which were consecrated to the glory of Him who is the

Wisdom, the Peace, and the Power of God, owed their foundation to the founder of the city. Constantine built also the Church of the Apostles. He was buried there according to his desire ; and that Church continued for some centuries to be the burial place of the Emperors.

The historians of the times describe the grandeur of the Churches of Constantine, though they do not speak of paintings. It is probable that there were none, for at that time the use of pictures in Churches had hardly commenced.

It cannot be a cause of surprise that we do not find any mention of favour bestowed upon sacred art by the successors of Constantine, for till the time of Theodosius Constantinople was under the influence of Arianism.

But, when Arianism was overthrown, many works must have been produced in Constantinople equal at the least to those which may be seen in the Churches of St. Paul and of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

It is related of Pulcheria that she built three Churches in Constantinople, which were dedicated to the Virgin. One of them was the large and famous Church in Blachernæ, the best quarter in Constantinople ; another was built in the Forum of the copper-smiths ; the third was built in the street called that of the Hodegi or Guides.

A remarkable story is told by Nicephorus Callisti, and mentioned by Baronius, of a picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke and placed by Pulcheria

in her Church in the street of the Guides.* This story is evidently the invention of a later time. The author of the treatise *De Sacris Imaginibus* examines it, and shows it to be without foundation.† A passage is produced in support of it from Theodorus Lector, who wrote about the year 520, to this effect, that "Eudocia sent to Pulcheria from Jerusalem a portrait of the Mother of Christ which Luke the Apostle had painted." This passage is believed by the author of the treatise just mentioned to be an interpolation; for in another place, where Theodorus speaks of Eudocia and her journey to Jerusalem, he says not a word about the picture. Besides, if the passage from Theodorus had been genuine, it would have been quoted at the second Council of Nice. Mention was indeed made by Germanus the Patriarch of Constantinople, in a letter written to Leo the Isaurian, of a picture painted by St. Luke, but not in connexion with the name of Pulcheria.

The reign of Justinian was a period of great activity in the building and decoration of Churches, and the examples of his works, which are extant in Ravenna, enable us to imagine what those which once adorned Constantinople must have been. Justinian rebuilt on a larger scale the Churches of St. Sophia and St. Irene, which had been burnt in the great tumult of the blue and green factions. There can be no doubt that paintings illustrating the Adoration of the Shepherds, the Adoration of the

* Baronius, A.D. 453.

† *Raccolta di Opuscoli Scientifici*, vol. xliii. Venezia, 1750.

Magi, and the Presentation in the Temple, subjects which appeared on the sarcophagi in Rome, would have been seen also in some of the twenty-five Churches which Justinian built in Constantinople alone.

The times of Heraclius were not favourable to the peaceful arts, for he had to beat his enemies away from the walls of Constantinople. The Persians under Chosroes pressed hard upon him, and he was obliged to propose conditions of peace. Chosroes received his proposals with scorn. "I did not desire offers of peace from Heraclius," said he, "I desired to see the man himself brought before me in chains. Let him deny the Crucified One, and worship the sun; I will grant him peace on no other condition." Heraclius began to make preparations for war. His religion was assailed by the insults of Chosroes as well as his empire. The occasion required a Christian demonstration, and the war became a crusade. Heraclius "took in his hand the theandric image made without hands, and he marched against the Persians."* The act was natural under the circumstances, and it is certain that belief in miraculous pictures of our Lord had begun. The valour of Heraclius and his troops, aided by superstition, gained the victory. It is to be observed, however, that it was the picture of Christ which gave confidence to the army; the time was not come when the picture of the Virgin was taken to battle.

* A fragment of Theophanes, edited by Petavius.

Heraclius was buried in the Church of the Apostles. His descendants occupied the throne ingloriously for four generations after him, not without terrible domestic tragedies. Constans his grandson, being jealous of his younger brother Theodosius, first compelled him to enter into deacon's orders, and afterwards took the more effectual means of causing him to be murdered. After that he was haunted by dreams, and saw Theodosius, who came to him as a deacon, and presenting the cup said, "Drink, brother, drink." Constantine IV. summoned the sixth General Council, which condemned the Monothelite opinions of his great-grandfather Heraclius. Historians and poets have written of the expensive tastes of Justinian II., but no mention is made of works done by him for the Church. He was beheaded by an assassin in an insurrection; and his youthful son Tiberius, having fled to the Church of the Virgin in Blachernæ, was stabbed while he clung to the altar, and buried in the conventual Church of the Holy Anargyri or Moneyless.

Of these Churches, so full of historical interest and once so rich in monuments, not one stone remains upon another. We only know that the best artists of the times had laboured in the decoration of them, and that the traditions of art were preserved and handed onwards by means of them.

Zeal had in a great measure grown cold in Constantinople under the princes of the family of Heraclius, and the faults of the fathers were to be expiated by the children. The religion of Mahomet had also

become a power in the world. The times were changed, and trial was at hand. It is now to be shown what information can be gained from the history of persecution concerning pictures and the painters of them.

A violent and unexpected storm, such as had not been known since the times of the heathen persecution, burst upon the Church. Leo the Isaurian, a valiant soldier, utterly destitute of learning, taste, and sentiment, was raised from the command of the army to the throne of Constantinople, and he has obtained notoriety in the Church as being the first of the Iconoclast emperors.

Leo became suddenly a destroyer of pictures ; and if he had been a pagan he could not have done the work of destruction with less patience and feeling. To put an end to the idolatrous worship of wood and stone, as he called it, he proceeded to purify religion with blows and not with arguments. Indeed the violence of the Iconoclasts takes us by surprise. It is impossible to guess what length of time Leo had given to deliberation before he began to act. There was nothing alarming in the signs of the times, nothing fresh in the way of provocation, to prepare us for so furious an attack. The blow came without warning on the part of Leo, and without expectation on the part of the Church. The whole world was astonished.

The violent outburst of Leo is an undisputed fact ; the motives which led him to this violence are not so clear. Curious motives have been attributed to him.

Some said that a volcanic eruption in the Archipelago was believed by him, at the suggestion of Mahometans, to be a token of the divine displeasure against images or pictures. Some said that a Jewish fortune-teller promised him great honour and glory if he would pledge himself to the extermination of pictures. In the absence of every intelligible motive it is not surprising that strange reasons should be given as the explanation of conduct so strange. Leo was not a philosopher like Julian the apostate, and therefore it is not possible to suppose that study had wrought deep convictions in him. It is not possible to suspect him of reasons founded on theological knowledge of the Law and the Gospel. Leo was a man of the sword, and he looked at questions of religion from a soldier's point of view.

It is very probable that the extraordinary success of the Mahometan arms even over Christian lands might have produced an impression on the uncultivated mind of Leo, and caused questions and doubts to arise. He was perplexed at the phenomenon of the victories of the Mahometans, and he wished to discover the secret. Arabia, Persia, and Syria, with Jerusalem and Antioch, had fallen into their power. Egypt and all Africa had been conquered. Finally, Spain had been easily subdued by them a short time before Leo ascended the throne of Constantinople. Victory and the abhorrence of pictures were in some way associated together in the mind of Leo. He persuaded himself that the Almighty so far set His

face against images, as to favour even a false religion which renounced the use of them. Leo therefore resolved to destroy pictures as the means of ensuring success in arms ; and he brought his principle to a practical test, the test of military success. Whatever most contributed to victory was to him most orthodox. And, while fortune attended his arms, he seemed to have the best of the argument, and his theological opponents could not reply to him.

We naturally inquire what those paintings were, which were thus condemned to be broken and burnt. We should expect to hear of some monstrous corruption of religion, some aggravated offence against sound doctrine and true piety, some prodigious wickedness such as to strike us with horror. It would naturally be inferred that, unless Leo has been under a strong delusion, the evil must have exceeded all bounds of tolerance to have needed so merciless a reformation. If any pictures, teaching doctrine scandalously false and corrupt, had been placed in the sight of the congregations, it would have been necessary to call attention to the abuse, and to stop the progress of error. But, if the complaint was that people worshipped such pictures as the traveller may see at this day in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, and in the Churches of Ravenna, then reason would say that it would have been better to put a restraint on superfluous demonstrations of devotion than to destroy those inoffensive works of art, which were appropriate ornaments of the Church in those days, and might have remained for years to

come as valuable examples of the picture-doctrine of early times.

It may be true that a superstitious veneration of the pictures of the Virgin and Saints had become prevalent. But if the pictures which remain in the Churches built in the times of Galla Placidia and Justinian are fair examples of the pictures of the early Church, there is nothing to be seen in them which can lead us to conclude that the pictures themselves had been the cause of any corruption of doctrine or practice. The worst accusation which could be made was that the practice of addressing words to the pictures and of making adoration before them had grown up among the sensitive and too flexible Orientals. But there was no necessary connexion between the ornaments of the Church and the practices of the people. And, if cause of blame had arisen, the correction of the error would have come most properly from the spiritual rulers, or, if necessary, from a Council of the Church. But Leo and his followers persecuted first, and held a Council of their own partisans afterwards.

The ground which Leo took would not satisfy any portion of the religious world in the present day. He made no objection to the invocation of the Virgin and the Saints, provided that the invocation was not addressed to them within sight of any painted representation. They, who had been in the habit of invoking the Virgin, were still at liberty to do so, and the destruction of the picture was not intended as a prohibition of the invocation. But all invocation

made before a picture was, according to Leo, idolatry; it was worship of wood and stone. No section whatever of professing Christians could sympathise with Leo. Romanist and Puritan would equally condemn him, and would be impartially anathematised by him. The Puritan, who demolished crosses and chopped off the heads of statues, would not have satisfied Leo, unless he also invoked the Saints. There has never been any sect in the world, except the Iconoclasts, which has held that the invocation of Saints without the use of pictures is commendable, while the same thing done with a picture in sight is to be abhorred as idolatry.

The history of the Iconoclasts, however, throws considerable light on the subject of art as connected with the Virgin. The violence of Leo compelled the Catholic party to speak; and from their remonstrances we learn incidentally what was the state of sacred art, and what the pictures were which brought down the anger of Leo upon the Church.

St. Germanus, the Patriarch of Constantinople, argued in defence of pictures, and tried to save the Churches from dishonour. Three letters written by him are extant, of which the substance is given by Baronius and Fleury. He says in one written to John Bishop of Synnada: "As we represent Christ, in the same way we paint the portrait of His undefiled Mother, the holy God-bearing Virgin, showing by these means that she, who existed as a woman according to nature and was in no respect different from all the rest of us, conceived God, who is invisi-

ble and holds all things in His hand, and brought Him forth incarnate, a thing beyond the comprehension of men and Angels." It may be observed in passing that the explanation, given by Germanus in defence of paintings, serves another purpose also, and undesignedly militates against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.

In a letter to Thomas Bishop of Claudiopolis, an Iconoclast, Germanus says: "We are obliged to refute the calumnies which the Mahometans bring against us. To-day is not the first time that the Jews and the real idolaters make this accusation with no other design than that of casting a reproach upon our faith."

Germanus in his letter to the Emperor endeavoured to show what had been the tradition of the Church from the beginning. Unfortunately however he spoke of the picture of Christ, which had been sent by Him to Abgarus, and of the picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke. Baronius gives his words thus: "His face was impressed on the divine napkin, and sent to Edessa to Abgarus prince of the country who begged for it. Lastly the picture of the Virgin Mother of God, which was sent from Jerusalem, was painted by the Evangelist Luke."* This is the first authentic mention of St. Luke as a painter; and the picture, to which allusion is here made, was probably the same as that which was afterwards supposed to have been sent from Jerusalem to

* Baronius, A.D. 726.

Pulcheria. A picture of the Virgin Mother of God seems to mean a picture of the Virgin and Child. It is clear from this letter that the idea of a picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke had already become familiar to the people of Constantinople.

Pope Gregory the Second as Baronius and Pagi believe, the Third as Fleury thinks, wrote to Leo two letters full of sound knowledge and right feeling. The writer believed in the genuineness of the picture supposed to have been sent to Abgarus, which however did not affect the merits of the question in general. The letters, which are extant in Greek, are given at full length in Baronius. If they were written by Gregory II., the Greek is a translation; if they are the letters of Gregory III., the Greek is his own.

Gregory explains to Leo the right use of sacred pictures. He tells him that they were not used as objects of adoration, but as the means of suggesting pious thoughts. He says to him: "You say that we worship stones and walls and boards. It is not as you say, Emperor. What we do is done to enliven our memory and to raise our dull hearts by means of those persons whose names we pronounce, whose aid we invoke, and whose likenesses we behold. But we do not worship the pictures as divine beings, as you say; far be that from us. And, if it is a picture of our Lord that we see, we say, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, succour and save us. But, if it is a picture of His Holy Mother, we say, Holy Mother of God, parent of our Lord, in-

tercede (πρέσβευσον) with thy Son, our true God, that He may save our souls. Or, if it is a picture of the Martyr, we say, Holy Stephen, who hast shed thy blood for Christ, and who, as the first martyr, hast liberty of speech, intercede (πρέσβευε) for us."

Idolatry was that of which Gregory was accused ; and he denies the charge of idolatry, though he fully admits the practice of the invocation of Saints. The argument of Gregory was addressed to one who acknowledged that there was no harm in simple invocation, provided that no worship was offered to the material picture. Leo on his own principles ought to have been satisfied. In the estimation of the Church of England, indeed, Gregory did a fond thing vainly invented. The Church of England countenances neither the invocation of Saints nor the adoration of images. But the Church of England is not committed to the principles of the Jews and Mahometans on the subject of painting, nor are we forbidden to decorate our Churches with pictures illustrating the Christian faith.

Gregory in continuation of his argument gives a list of the pictures which were commonly placed in the Churches at that time. The list of Gregory may be produced without any fear of reproach, and it is impossible to feel anything but admiration and esteem towards the man who wrote the following words : "When I myself enter a Church, and contemplate the paintings of the miracles of our Lord, and the portrait of His Holy Mother holding the Child our

Lord God in her arms, and the Angels assisting and singing Holy, Holy, Holy, I return home not without compunction of heart. For is there one who is not touched in his heart and moved to tenderness just as I am, when he beholds the Baptismal Font, and the priests standing round, and the Mystical Supper; and the illumination of the blind, the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the leper and the paralytic; the multitude seated on the grass, the baskets, and the fragments that remain; the Transfiguration at Mount Tabor; the Crucifixion of Christ, His Burial and Resurrection; and the Descent of the Holy Ghost? Who, that beholds the picture of Abraham and the knife imminent over the neck of the boy, is not pricked in heart and moved to tears?"

From the pleading of Gregory we understand distinctly the nature of the pictures which were exhibited in the Churches for the edification of the people. These pictures are similar to those which had been familiar in the Church from the times of Theodosius Pulcheria and Justinian. We have over again a list of the subjects which appeared so frequently on the sculptured sides of the sarcophagi. And this is the catalogue of the pictures which were condemned by Leo to destruction. It cannot be a cause of rejoicing that the prayer of Gregory was rejected. Such a man as Leo would have burnt the cartoons of Raphael.

But that which is to be noticed especially in this catalogue is the painting of the Holy Mother of God holding the Child in her arms, as she had been

painted since the Council of Ephesus. The picture of the Virgin was that of a woman as she appeared in real life, as she is described in Scripture. It was not as a legendary person, invested with unscriptural attributes, that the Virgin was represented in the time of the Iconoclasts. It was not pretended that false doctrine was taught by means of painting. The art of later ages has set forth the glories of the Immaculate Conception, of the Assumption, and of the Coronation of Mary, ideas which had not been imagined in the days of Leo the Isaurian. The Virgin Mary was in his days painted as the Mother who had the care of the Child Jesus Christ for at least twelve years of His life. She was known only in her quality of maternity. And, as long as she was contemplated reverentially under that aspect, there was no danger but much comfort to the congregation.

Leo was not to be moved by argument or entreaty, and havoc was made in the Churches. Rude agents of Leo's will, fitter for employment in the camp than in the sanctuary, went forth with axes and hammers to effect a reformation of religion. Works in mosaic of the Good Shepherd, and of Christ with the Cross, and of the Virgin and Child, which Pulcheria might have placed in her Churches, were scraped from the walls and swept up from the pavement by the police officers of Leo. Paintings of Christ with Apostles and Evangelists, which Chrysostom might have seen, were white-washed by a process much cheaper than that by which

the colours had been laid on. Leo, having begun the work of defacing Churches and exiling Bishops, left it unfinished to be continued by his son and successor, Constantine Copronymus.

When the orthodox Bishops had been expelled from their sees, and their places had been judiciously filled by Bishops submissive to the Emperor, Copronymus proceeded to hold what he called the seventh General Council. The Church of Pulcheria in Blachernæ, after its walls had been well purified from paintings, was prepared for the Council. With votes secured beforehand, the Iconoclasts carried their measures and condemned pictures with an unanimity which had nothing wonderful in it. Copronymus had been, like his father, successful in war, and he was not destitute of that support which the palace generally commanded. Constantinople accepted the decision of the Council with obedience. The unstable multitude, which took both sides by turns in this dispute, and was carried to excess first in one way and then in the other, went entirely with Copronymus on this occasion. The lower orders of Constantinople, with an instinctive sense of justice, gave to Copronymus himself, and not to his Bishops, the credit of having banished the fine arts from the city. When the decision of the Council falsely so called was proclaimed, the rabble assembled round the palace, and saluted the Emperor with these cries: "To-day salvation is come to the world, because by thy help, O Emperor, we have been delivered from idols."

The Iconoclasts, if they flattered themselves with the idea that they were labouring for the purity of religion, had not much reason to congratulate themselves upon their success. There was no compensation in spiritual improvement for the exile of so many of the clergy and people, and for the damage done to the Churches. Italy revolted from the Emperor, and religion did not flourish any the more in those parts of the empire which remained under the government of the destroyer of pictures. Violence triumphed for a while ; it was easy to break and to burn ; but discord and desolation were the result. The empire was diminished ; its forces were weakened ; the schools were deserted, and learning declined. Instead of an age of evangelical light and purity an age of darkness and ignorance came over Constantinople.

The fine arts, already fallen much below the standard of classical times, became still more depressed. For not only were paintings of the Virgin and Saints split up and cast into the fire, but in the indiscriminating fury of the destroyer many precious works of ancient art perished. Good models became scarce, the love of art grew cold, taste became deteriorated, and the few artists who remained in Constantinople languished for want of patronage.

The tide turned after a while, and the Empress Irene, who had succeeded to power as the guardian of her son, expelled the Iconoclasts and recalled the exiled clergy. A Council which she attempted to hold in Constantinople was interrupted by a tumult

of the populace. The place of assembly was then changed to Nice, where, under the auspices of Irene, the seventh General Council was held in the year 787. As the Council was composed of Bishops belonging to the party which had been persecuted by Leo and his son, it declared itself of course in favour of images, and condemned the Iconoclasts.

But an important party in the Church had not been consulted. The Frankish Bishops had not been summoned to the Council of Irene ; and, having heard an imperfect report of the decisions of the Council, they thought that the adoration of images had been enforced upon all as a thing necessary to salvation, and they were much dissatisfied. They complained that the Greeks could see no middle way between adoring pictures and burning them. A Council was therefore held at Frankfort to consider the matter from a Teutonic point of view. That Council distinctly condemned the Iconoclasts, but it declared itself unwilling to consent to the necessity of image-worship. In accordance with this decision Charlemagne, King of the Franks, but not yet Emperor of the West, issued the following order : " We permit images of the Saints to be made by all who may wish to make them for the love of God and His Saints either inside or outside the Church. But we by no means oblige any to adore them who are unwilling to do so. If any person shall attempt to break or destroy them, we do not permit it." The resolutions of the Council of Frankfort compelled Pope Adrian to interpose with an explanation.

Adrian informed the Franks that the second Council of Nice had not made it binding upon all Christians to adore pictures ; it had only declared the practice lawful and allowable, and it anathematised none except those who broke and burnt pictures. The explanation of Adrian left the customs and opinions of the Franks untouched. In this manner the Councils of Nice and Frankfort were brought into a sort of harmony together, and the subjects of Charlemagne continued to be in communion with those of Irene on the basis of mutual tolerance.

Under Irene the painters and worshippers of pictures enjoyed a time of tranquillity. But Irene was not a person to give strength and respectability to the cause which she patronised. The Church soon fell back into confusion, and the persecution of pictures and of the possessors of them was renewed.

The worst of the Iconoclast emperors was Theophilus. Paintings were destroyed wherever they were found, and the possessors, painters, and worshippers of them were imprisoned, scourged, blinded, or branded on the face with bad iambic verses. In the mean while the Mahometans pressed hard upon Theophilus, and the less he was favoured by fortune so much the more he persecuted. But it was to no purpose that he broke pictures and banished artists. The Saracens of Africa gained ground upon him in Sicily from day to day ; the Saracens of Asia defeated him in a great battle at Amorium. Victory and picture-breaking were found to have no connexion

with each other. The cause of the Iconoclast fell into discredit when the fortune of war turned against him. To be unsuccessful in arms was to be beaten in argument. Theophilus was surnamed the Unfortunate, and he was the last of the Iconoclasts.

Bishops and priests are mentioned by name as having suffered in the persecution of Theophilus, for ecclesiastical writers have given a place in history to confessors of their own order. But painters have had no historian in Constantinople, and therefore their names and merits are unknown to posterity. A monk named Lazarus, however, is celebrated for his courage under suffering, and for his perseverance as a painter of the Virgin and the Saints; and he is said to have outlived the last of the Iconoclasts, notwithstanding the imprisonment and tortures to which he had been condemned. His merits and services have been recognised in more modern times in a picture placed in the Church of St. Luke in Rome, in which he is represented as suffering under torture.

Yet the Madonnas of Greek artists of this period still exist in Rome, and they may be seen wrought in mosaic in the Churches of Leo III. and Paschal I. Though these works give evidence of a low state of art, they prove nevertheless that the traditions of art were still alive, and that the mind of the artist was bent on the task of producing an improved type of the Virgin Mary, such as might be received as a suitable expression of Christian feeling. The tech-

nical part of the painter's art was unskilfully done, but the sentimental part was certainly on the way to improvement amidst all the disadvantages of the times. Artists had to think and to paint under the fear of death and banishment. And yet there is no doubt that the conventional types of our Saviour and the Virgin, which became so familiar to the Greeks and Italians of later times, were in a great measure due to the labour and study of artists who worked during these times of persecution. Those conventional types, which the Christian world has received by consent, were not the creation of a single mind or of a single age. They were wrought out by the combined efforts of many minds labouring together to find a more perfect expression of the moral beauty of the great originals. And the artists who worked in the time of the Iconoclasts did their full share in bringing those portraits nearer to perfection.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FEAST OF ORTHODOXY.

A GREAT change came over the Church of the East at the death of Theophilus. The Empress Theodora, his widow, reversed all the acts of the Iconoclasts, and restored pictures to the Churches. The victory, which remained for the future with the defenders of pictures, was celebrated in the year 842 by the great Festival of Orthodoxy. All Constantinople rejoiced. Painters were actively employed; pictures were brought out of their hiding-places; the likenesses of Christ and the Virgin were exhibited in Churches decked with ornament for the occasion; and two very feeble compositions were set to music and sung by the choirs.

These compositions may be found in Baronius. At the end of each portion of them there is an address to the Virgin. The following verses are specimens of these hymns or odes: "The swords of impious heresies have manifestly come to nought; for when with all devotion we behold thy sanctuary, O most pure Virgin, adorned with pictures, we are filled with sacred joy;" "The curse of our first mother Eve has been taken away, O God-bearing Virgin! because thou, O pure Virgin, in an ineffable

manner hast given birth to the Lord of all, whose likeness we now venerate in paintings." The following flattery is rather too strong to be excused even in a court poet: "Celebrated in every hymn with much glory, Virgin-mother, parent of God, deliver from hard accusations those who honour thy undefiled maternity; for we have no other succour but thee, bride of God."

In these hymns there are the usual faults of the birth-day ode, and there are several phrases to which objection may be made. But though the Virgin is called our succour, help, and refuge, she is not styled the Queen of Heaven; that is not a title of the Virgin in the Greek Church. And when the froth is blown away from these complimentary odes, there is substantial truth remaining.

But controversies in the Church are seldom ended without leaving painful, or at least unpleasant and troublesome, consequences behind. While the Iconoclasts used fire and sword, the defenders of pictures had no other weapons for the support of their cause than arguments and pious frauds. The fury of the persecutors defeated its own purpose, while the constancy of the persecuted gave respectability to their cause and raised them to the rank of martyrs. Unfortunately, however, tales of miracles and of wonder-working pictures began to be circulated among the people, so that in the end superstition was increased rather than diminished by the violence of the picture-destroyers. A story told of John of Damascus, who is reputed to be the last of

the Greek Fathers, is a good example of the legends which were invented and believed in Constantinople after the time of the Iconoclasts.

John, or Mansur as he was called by his Mahometan fellow townsmen, lived in Damascus, which was then the seat of the Mahometan government, and he enjoyed the confidence of the Ommiade Caliph, who resided in that city. John was an able and strenuous defender of pictures in the time of Leo the Isaurian; and Leo wishing to punish him, but not having power to seize him in the dominions of the Caliph, had recourse to a stratagem. Leo caused a letter to be written in the name of John, containing an offer to betray the city of Damascus to the Roman Emperor. Leo sent this letter, with great professions of honourable sentiments and of virtuous indignation against the traitor, to the Caliph, hoping by such means to procure the condemnation of John. The Caliph being convinced of John's treason by evidence so clear, commanded that the right hand which had written the letter should be cut off, and hung up in a public place. In the evening after the execution of the sentence John begged that the hand might be given to him, and the Caliph, whose anger was considerably abated, granted the request. John then took the hand, and having applied it to the mutilated arm he prayed before a picture of the Virgin that she who knew his innocence would intercede with her Son, and obtain for him the restoration of his hand. Upon that he fell asleep, and dreamt that the Virgin appeared to him precisely like the portrait before

which he had prayed, and promised that his hand should be restored. Then he awoke, and found his hand healthily joined to his arm, with only a narrow mark to show where the flesh had been cut. John's innocence was thus made evident, but the story does not say that Leo and the Caliph were converted.

Such stories as this had not entered into the imagination of the people before the persecution was begun by Leo, but they abounded afterwards. They were not the cause and justification of Leo's persecution, but the fruits of it, and they show that the Iconoclasts did more mischief than good to the Church. Unfortunately many superstitions, which had been called into existence by the provocations of the persecuting party, held their ground in the public mind when the rage and fury of the Iconoclasts had died away. Great allowance must be made for any want of calmness and self-restraint on the part of the orthodox. It would not have been surprising if impatience had hurried them much farther into excess. It is well that in the reaction the opinions and proceedings of the party, which had been oppressed by the Iconoclasts, have not been more damaging to the truth than they have been; it is well that the Church of Constantinople under such provocation continued to bear witness to the truth with so much faithfulness and moderation.

A story of the times of Theophilus is told by later Byzantine writers, which, though it is probably untrue in fact, was nevertheless forged with regard to probability, and may serve at least to illustrate the

manners of the Byzantine court. Denderis the dwarf, remarkable for the dry simplicity of his sayings, was kept as a jester for the amusement of the lords and ladies of the palace. Entering the apartment of the Empress Theodora one day rather suddenly, he surprised her at her devotions before pictures of the Virgin and Saints. He went and told the Emperor that he had found the Empress caressing the most beautiful pictures that he had ever seen. The Emperor, suspecting the truth, went in a fury and demanded an explanation from the Empress, who burst into a fit of laughter, and said that the dwarf had found her attiring herself for an airing, and had seen her beholding her own reflection in a mirror. She did not, however, fail to order a sufficient number of stripes to be administered to the dwarf, which left so good an impression upon him that he never afterwards heard the word pictures pronounced without laying his finger on his lips.

The Feast of Orthodoxy was the beginning of a new era in Constantinople. The arts and sciences, which had reached the period of their lowest debasement, began to recover themselves. Cæsar Bardas, the brother of the Empress Theodora, caused schools to be opened, and drew forward out of a state of poverty and obscurity the few learned men who could be found in Constantinople. The learning of Photius, who flourished soon after this time, was a remarkable exception to the ignorance which was the general rule.

The fine arts narrowly escaped the destruction which had been intended for them. We know that painters continued to work, and that the principles of art, so far as they were known, were handed on to succeeding generations. We know that Byzantine art became improved both in sentiment and in execution when peaceful times returned. We know that Byzantine artists went forth at a later period, and carried their knowledge with them to Venice, Pisa, Rome, and Palermo, and gave a new beginning to art in Italy.

New inventions have in a great measure superseded the ancient modes of operation in painting. In some respects art is the same. The art of working in mosaic has never been lost from the early days of the Roman empire to the present time. The mode of painting *a fresco* has been known from the times of Pompeii or earlier. These branches of art are practised now as of old. The art of painting on panel, or of laying colour on wood, has gone through changes. The painters of Rome and Constantinople had a method of painting with wax and colour mixed together. The Greeks called this method *κηρογραφία*, or wax-painting. It was in use in the time of the Iconoclasts; for Nicephorus the Patriarch speaks of portraits executed in mosaic and on board covered with melted wax, τὰς διὰ ψηφίδων χρυσῶν καὶ κηροχύτου ὕλης εἰκονογραφίας.* Theophanes Cerameus, repeating the fable which made St. Luke a

* *History of Constantinople*, by Nicephorus, edited by Petavius.

painter, said that he painted likenesses of the Virgin with wax and colour. Critics have had difficulty in understanding these words of Theophanes. Some have supposed that he meant that St. Luke formed images of wax and then coloured them.* Gretser the Jesuit, who had no patience with those who doubted the fact that St. Luke painted the Virgin, refused, however, to believe that the images or portraits were made of wax, for in that case he ought to have been called a modeller, and not a painter.† The explanation of the words is easy. In ancient and medieval art wax was the vehicle with which the colour was mixed, and the mixture of wax and colour in a liquid state was laid upon the wood. There is no doubt that ancient pictures of the Virgin painted with wax and colour are still in existence. Experiments have been tried upon some of the old paintings of the Greeks, and they have been found to yield wax. This mode of painting fell into disuse and afterwards into oblivion. It was superseded by the method of painting *a tempera*, which in its turn gave way to the still better method invented by John of Bruges of mixing colour with drying oil.

Under the wise and vigorous government of the Macedonian line Constantinople rose in credit, and victory attended those who prayed in Churches adorned with pictures. If there was war abroad there was peace at home, and the art of painting pursued its

* *Raccolta di Opuscoli Scientifici*, vol. 43.

† Gretser, vol. xv. p. 205.

course, tenacious of life and tenacious of truth. In the time of Basil I. the money of the empire, though rude in workmanship and base in the quality of the metal, showed upon it an increase of religious sentiment. Instead of the Labarum with the sacred monogram, which was stamped upon the coin of Constantine and his successors, and instead of the Orb and Cross which appeared on the coin from the time of Justinian, the money coined in the reign of Basil and onwards bears on it the figure of our Saviour, or of the Virgin and Child, with an inscription of a religious signification. No one, who looks at a coin of this period showing the head of Christ, can doubt for a moment whose image it is.

It was under the Macedonian princes that the conventional portraits of our Lord and the Virgin, as we know them at the present day, were brought to perfection in idea at least, if not in execution. This was a remarkable step in the progress of sacred art. The portraits, which were intended to represent them in early times, had in them little of a fixed or peculiar character; that of our Lord was in dress and appearance the figure of an ordinary Roman or Greek, that of the Virgin showed her merely as a lady of the times. It was felt, however, that the outward appearance of these sacred persons could not change with the fashions of the world, and that an expression of countenance suited to their characters ought to be given to them. There had been hitherto an unsteadiness in the treatment of these subjects, and to devise a conventional type, which should be

accepted by common consent and altered no more, was the great problem of sacred art in the middle ages. We may see in the Churches of Paschal I. in Rome some approach to the type required. Yet those attempts were short of what art accomplished a century or two later. The face of our Lord was too gloomy in expression ; His hair and beard were black. His garments had no particular significance in them ; sometimes they were of gold, at other times of some other colour. The Virgin also varied according to the manner of the times or of the artist. Sometimes she was painted with much religious feeling, gravely hooded as a sign of humility and love of retirement. But at other times she was seen, in Rome at least, with a crown on her head and with other ornaments of dress, signs of a desire to promote her to worldly glory. These caprices of art did not satisfy Christian sentiment. Art in fact was still young and untutored, and was feeling its way to a more perfect expression of truth.

Persecution naturally retarded the progress of art. But when emperors became once more patrons of art and decorators of Churches, the painter had liberty and encouragement to give expression to the best ideas of sacred subjects which he was able to imagine. The portrait of Christ began to assume that character which we are accustomed to see in painting. The flowing hair of light brown colour, the ample forehead, the mild eye, the healthy look, the short beard, the grave benevolent countenance, were accepted by general consent as the best expression

by which the art of the painter could represent the Saviour of mankind. The dress of Christ was made plain in form and rich in colour. No colours were thought more appropriate than those which were peculiar to the highest personage in the world. These colours could hardly have been assigned to Christ in the time of the Iconoclasts. For the emperors, who destroyed all pictures of Christ, would have counted it a double offence to paint Him wearing the imperial colours ; nor would the artists themselves have desired to clothe Him in the colours of those, who were making havoc of things sacred. The case was altered under Basil and his successors. It seems probable that the ideal portrait of Christ was brought to a fixed state about the middle or the end of the tenth century ; and no painter since then has ventured to depart from the acknowledged conventional type.

And the conventional portrait of the Virgin Mary passed through similar stages before it was brought to that state beyond which the imagination of artists has not been able to carry it. The ornaments of worldly pride and luxury were little by little laid aside, for they were felt to be a weak and insufficient mode of expressing the spiritual graces of the handmaid of the Lord. The colours of honour and dignity were assigned to her, for none others were thought worthy of her. The form of her dress was that of one who had entered into the monastic state, because it was felt that she ought to appear in the habit which denoted the highest walk of spiritual life. She

was therefore painted in a garb which was a combination of imperial dignity with a state of saintliness. She was represented as one of high estate, who had been called to a spiritual office. The imagination of Byzantine artists could not attain to a higher idea than this combination of the imperial colours with the habit of a nun ; nor, indeed, has the idea ever been surpassed.

The pictures of Christ and of the Virgin which were executed after this period show them thus represented. And so invariable was the mode of treatment, so constantly did it pass from teachers to pupils, that it must be considered as a law of art accepted by all and binding upon all.

Examples of Byzantine art as it was in the days of the Macedonian princes undoubtedly exist, but their history is lost, and it is not possible to trace any of them to their origin. An almanack, or calendar, may seem but an unpromising vehicle for the conveyance of the traditions of art. Yet amongst the most interesting remains of the middle ages must be reckoned the *Menologium Græcum*, which is an evidence at the same time of the state of religious opinion and of the state of sacred art. The *Menologium Græcum* is a copious calendar of the Greek Church, containing not only all the Festivals of more solemn observance, but also all the days of the minor Saints and Martyrs, and it was prepared expressly for the Emperor Basil II., about the year 1000. It is one of the rarest and most curious treasures of the Vatican library, and it is very seldom shown ; but it was printed in Urbino

in the year 1727, so that the text may be seen in the printed edition, and the miniatures also, but not in colours.

The miniatures are small pictures, about seven inches long each, illustrative of the event of the day, and marked with the name of the artist. Unfortunately this work, which was begun with so much care and exactness, was never completed ; for, though the text contains a notice of the event of each holy day throughout the year, the miniatures begin with September and cease at the end of February. We are therefore deprived of the means of knowing how the artists would have treated the Annunciation, and the Sleep of the Virgin, and the subjects proper to all the moveable Feasts.

The miniatures have reference for the most part to martyrdoms, which become tiresome from the repetition of the same scenes of hanging, burning, and beheading. The figures badly formed, and the buildings drawn in false perspective, betoken a low state of art. But the work is interesting in the highest degree, as presenting views which were probably those of Churches, monasteries, palaces, and arcades, then existing in Constantinople ; while the dresses of the persons, and the treatment of the subjects, enable us to understand the ideas which were familiar to the Greeks at that time.

There is a clear distinction made between the religious and secular dresses. St. Pelagia, for example, is first represented in the gay attire of a fashionable lady of the world, and then without jewels and orna-

ments, in the dress of one who had retired from the world.

But those miniatures which refer to the Virgin are most to the present purpose. The Nativity of the Virgin is among them. The subject is treated in a very simple manner. St. Anne reclines on a couch dressed in the religious habit of the time. The Virgin is bathed by females. There are no signs whatever of miraculous agency. This treatment of the subject was invariably followed for many subsequent ages.

The Conception of the Virgin, which was already a Festival of the Greek though not yet of the Latin Church, is also found painted in the Menologium without any superstitious or apocryphal intervention of Angels; and in the description a statement is made which seems designed to exclude all idea of an immaculate conception and a miraculous birth. St. Anne here also wears the religious dress.

The twenty-fifth of December, the Festival of the Nativity, is illustrated according to Greek usage with two pictures, one being the Adoration of the Magi, the other the Adoration of the Shepherds, with separate descriptions of each event.

In the former the Magi offer their gifts to the Child in the usual manner. In the latter the Virgin is seen on a couch dressed as a religious person. The Child is in the manger by which the ox and the ass are standing; and a ray of light proceeding from His Body shoots upwards and terminates in a star, which is seen over the stable. Joseph is in repose

on one side. The Child is seen a second time in the same picture bathed by women. The Shepherds with sheep are entering. This subject has varied very little from the beginning, and it will be seen in later times treated almost in the same manner as in the Menologium.

The sixth of January is in the Greek Church the Festival of the Epiphany or Baptism of Christ, and it is illustrated with an appropriate miniature.

The fifteenth of August is the Sleep of the most glorious Lady the Mother of God. This term satisfied the Church of Constantinople in the year 1000. Unfortunately there is no miniature in the Menologium to illustrate the event, or we should have had an example to show us how the matter was treated by Greek artists of the time of Basil II. But the text, which explains the circumstances of the event which was celebrated on that day, may be taken as an authorised exposition of doctrine.

The text says that, when it pleased our Lord to take to Himself His own Mother, He sent an Angel to announce to her that the time of her departure was at hand. She rejoiced, and having prepared all things she waited. Loud thunder was heard, and the Apostles were gathered together. "And, having been laid in a becoming attitude upon the couch, she committed her holy soul into the hands of her Son and her God. However, her undefiled corpse, having been buried by the Apostles, was not found after the third day. For Thomas having opened the tomb to adore the corpse (*λεψανον*), inasmuch as he came later than the others, did not find it. For God trans-

lated it (*αὐτὸ*) to a place which He himself knew, and the linen clothes alone were found."

Setting aside the legend of the miraculous presence of the Apostles, and of the visit of Thomas to the tomb, we find it stated in this document that Mary died and gave up her spirit into the hands of Christ; and that she was buried, and that her remains were not found, because God caused them to be deposited in a place known to Himself alone. There is no mention of the reanimation of the body of the Virgin, no mention of the translation of it to heaven. All that is said is this, that the corpse of the Virgin was not found, because God caused it to be translated to a secret place of safety. This is a quiet way of setting to rest troublesome inquiries, and a rebuke to the mischievous activity of relic-seekers. It is a declaration that the remains of the Virgin Mary are not to be found, a declaration which was at one time greatly needed. And all this is in perfect harmony with true and sound belief: for no one doubts that God has taken the remains of the Virgin into His own especial care, though no one knows the place where they were deposited. No Church can say less than this, though no Church has authority to say more. And if the Assumption of the Virgin were explained to mean simply this, that Christ has received her spirit while no one knows where her earthly remains are laid, there is no Christian who might not receive the doctrine; for in fact it leaves the matter precisely where Scripture leaves it. But Sleep is the preferable term.

Although the Menologium of Basil contains no miniature of the death or sleep of the Virgin, yet several early pictures of the subject are still in existence which correspond with this account. The point of time chosen is that at which the Virgin expires and yields her spirit into the arms of Christ, while the Apostles stand around. The subject was treated in accordance with this description not only by Greek but also by some early Italian artists, until the tradition was unfortunately changed.

The second of July was kept according to the Menologium in remembrance of the deposition of the venerable garment of the Deipara. The story of the garment is this. In the reign of the Emperor Leo the Great two patrician brothers, Galbius and Candidus, felt a desire to travel and to adore the holy places, and they went to Palestine accordingly. Passing near the house of an old woman they saw there a crowd of sick persons laid upon couches. They inquired what was the cause of this, and they were told that the garment of the Deipara was kept there. They begged permission to adore it, and they were admitted. During the night, after having stealthily taken the measure of the box which contained the relic, they went to Jerusalem and procured a similar box. Having returned to the house they left the counterfeit box, and carried away that which contained the relic, which they conveyed to Constantinople and deposited in the Church of the Virgin at Blachernæ, giving thanks together with the Emperor and the people for the acquisition of such a treasure.

It seems that stealing was considered a pious act when relics were concerned. This garment comes into mention once in the history of later art. Vasari tells us that Cosimo Roselli painted the Virgin Mary giving her robe to St. Philip. But the legend brought no profit with it, and therefore it had no great interest for the Italians, and it vanished from the catalogue of the painter's works.

The thirty-first of August was kept in honour of the deposition of the precious girdle of the Deipara. This relic has made a figure in the Church, and it is of some reputation in the history of painting. Arcadius the son of Theodosius the Great, having taken the girdle from Jerusalem where it had been kept with the garment, brought it to Constantinople and deposited it in an urn called the Sacred Urn. Forty years afterwards the Emperor Leo opened the urn on account of the Empress Zoe, who was afflicted with an evil spirit, and was assured in a vision that if the girdle was laid upon her she would be cured. The urn was opened, and the girdle, when it was laid on Zoe by the Patriarch of Constantinople, immediately cured her of her plague.

This story, as well as that of the garment, resulted probably from the persecution of the Iconoclasts; and it helps to show how great was the desire felt in later ages to trace every fictitious relic to the times of Arcadius and Pulcheria.

The girdle, if it is the same, has since then become the glory of Prato in Tuscany, to which place by some means it has found its way, for all relics have

a tendency to seek Italian shores. The legend was absurd enough as it was known by the Greeks; the Italians have improved upon it. According to the additions of the Italians the girdle was dropped into the hands of Thomas at the Assumption of the Virgin. There is no mention in the Menologium of the Assumption, or of Thomas as the receiver of the relic. The girdle is there spoken of as an ordinary part of dress, which might have been the property of the Virgin Mary at the time of her death. The Italians regard it as a miraculous relic dropped from the sky as a visible token of the Virgin's Assumption into heaven.

The Virgin was supposed to have a large share in the later successes of the empire; and, when the army returned home in triumph, the most conspicuous place was given to her picture. It is related of John Zimisces that a car was sent to convey him into the city after a great victory obtained over the Bulgarians. The warrior, however, declined to take his seat upon the car, and, placing there the portrait of the Virgin, he rode upon a white horse. John Comnenus, or Calo-Joannes, having been victorious over the Persians, entered Constantinople in triumph. A car had been prepared for him; but he declined to ascend it, and placing in it the portrait of the Virgin, to whom he said the victory was due, he walked before on foot. And Manuel Comnenus on a similar occasion carried the picture of the Virgin in a chariot drawn by four horses.

But the power of the picture was not invincible

Alexius Ducas, otherwise called Mourzoufle, before he gave battle to the Crusaders commanded by Dandolo, ordered that the priests, robed in their vestments, should carry in front of the army the portrait of the Virgin, which the Emperors had been accustomed to take to battle as their ally. The picture, together with the imperial standard, fell into the hands of the Crusaders, and the Greeks were completely routed. The Venetians maintain that this picture is still kept in the Church of St. Mark.

The picture of the Virgin, which was regarded with the greatest superstition, was that which was kept in the Church built by Pulcheria in the street of the Hodegi, and was supposed to have been painted by St. Luke. If this picture was indeed always the same as that which was mentioned by Germanus in his letter to Leo the Isaurian, it must have escaped many a peril.* The emperors, when they were about to commence an expedition, were accustomed to offer solemn prayers in that Church that the Virgin Mary would grant them a prosperous journey and conduct them home in safety. And on their return they gave thanks in the same Church for the protection granted to them.

At the capture of Constantinople this picture was stolen by the Crusaders from the shrine in which it was kept. Complaint was made to Pope Innocent III. of the robbery. Innocent, in a letter which he wrote concerning the matter, spoke of the picture as that which Luke the Evangelist was said to have painted

* See p. 105.

with his own hands. He gave the order for the restoration of it; "although," he said, "we by no means approve of that opinion, which the Greeks hold, that the spirit of the Blessed Virgin rests in the aforesaid picture, for which reason they worship it more than what is right."*

After the restoration of this picture to Constantinople it was kept in the monastery of Chora, from which it was at last taken by the Turks, who removed the gold, silver, and precious stones from it, and then broke it to pieces under their feet.

There was also a picture of the Virgin in the Church in Blachernæ, from which the veil which covered it was miraculously removed once a week. On Friday evening after vespers the veil was drawn up without hands or machinery, and the painting remained uncovered till vespers on Sunday, after which the veil descended in the same miraculous manner and covered the picture. This story is told by a writer of very indifferent Latin verses; and, as he uses the word *Lacerna* instead of *Blachernæ*, it is to be hoped that he was misinformed on other points also. The following limping lines are a specimen of his poem:—

Græco more hic decore Virginis iconia
Natum gestat, sindone stat velata sericâ,
Nec videtur donec detur Sabbato vigilia.
At cum hora vespertina Matris festa incipit,
Se expansum et repansum velum sursum recipit,
Atque vultum venerandum Virginis aperit.†

* Ducange, *Lib. IV. cap. 2. Pagi, Breviarium*, Vol. II. p. 108.

† *Ibid.*

When the Crusaders took Constantinople by storm, they put the rights of conquest mercilessly in force against the captured city. The inhabitants were not spared; the holy pictures were trampled under foot; the relics were strewed about. Gold and silver were the first objects of plunder, and next to them the bones of Saints. Precious stones, silks and velvets, spices and rich moveables, were eagerly taken. Pictures, unless they had the reputation of miraculous power, were treated as things of less consequence by the unenlightened Franks.

From that time, however, a better taste began to prevail in Western Europe. Greek pictures were dispersed among other lands. Artists from Constantinople began to paint and to teach in Italy; for this was precisely the time when those Greeks went to Tuscany who taught Giunta Pisano and Guido of Siena, the painters whose names are the earliest that are known in the Italian art of the middle ages.

Painting still continued to be practised in Constantinople. Nicephorus, who wrote during the reign of Andronicus Palæologus the elder, that is, about the year 1300, has given a description of the Virgin's personal appearance according to the tradition then current. It is as follows: "She had a colour resembling wheat, yellow hair, piercing eyes of a colour inclining to yellow, and very similar to that of an olive. She had arched eyebrows of a comely darkness, a nose rather long, lips florid and full of the sweetness of her words. Her face was not round, and it was not pointed, but somewhat long;

her hands and fingers also were rather long.”* This description agrees, of course, with the pictures of the day, and was without doubt suggested by them; and many of the pictures of the Virgin which are still in existence were painted according to this idea of her.

When Constantinople was conquered by the Turks, the unhappy Greeks consoled themselves with the belief that the sacred relics which had been kept in the city were carried away to heaven by Angels, and that they so escaped profanation from the hands of the infidels. It is well for religion that those vanities and superstitions disappeared, even if so rude a shock as the Mahometan conquest was necessary for the removal of them. Six hundred years elapsed between the Feast of Orthodoxy and the fall of Constantinople. During that period many frivolous and mischievous superstitions had established themselves, and the evil increased as the times became more critical and the danger more threatening. The special protection of the Virgin, to which the Greeks trusted for the safety of their capital, failed them signally at the time when they most needed it. Constantinople was undeceived by proofs which convinced it sternly of the futility of its superstitions. The fall of Constantinople was a grievous blow to an ancient and illustrious Church; but it was also, to a certain extent, the reformation of that Church. The worst that can be said of the Church of Constanti-

* Baronius, A.D. 48.

noble is this, that it permitted superstitious practices to grow. But it cannot be said of that Church that it has ever corrupted the faith of the Catholic Apostolic Church ; and, when the opportunity shall come, that noble Church may yet again be the light and glory of the East.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHAPEL ROYAL OF PALERMO.

WHILE the art of the painter, though nearly if not quite extinct in Italy, was still alive and active in Constantinople, a door was unexpectedly opened for its entrance into Sicily. The Normans, after having become masters of Apulia and all Southern Italy, crossed the Straits of Messina in the year 1060, and wrested Sicily from the hands of the Mahometans. In the lands conquered by them they laid the foundations of a glorious kingdom, equal in extent to what was afterwards called the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and they chose Palermo for the capital.

At this time Constantinople, though already surpassed in the art of war by the rising nations of the West, was still the most polite and magnificent city of Europe. And it was the ambition of the Norman princes of Sicily to raise their capital to an equality with that city which still called itself the metropolis of the world. The best of Saracen architects who could be found in Sicily, and the best of Greek artists who could be brought from Constantinople, were employed by King Roger and his lords to build their Churches and their palaces. Normans, Greeks

and Saracens laboured together to make Palermo a residence fit for a Christian king.

The Normans have left their mark on Sicily as well as on England. But, while in England they prided themselves on the massive solidity of their Churches and castles, they built in Sicily with a view to elegance rather than to strength. The Norman Churches in Sicily do not show the external grandeur of a Church of the same period in England, but their inner walls are enriched with the most costly decorations which the art of the time could supply.

Mr. Gally Knight has written with the love of an enthusiast upon the Norman architecture of Sicily, and he has shown how the Northern and Oriental styles meet there unexpectedly on terms of friendship, and how the dog's-tooth moulding of the Normans is found inserted in the pointed arch of the Saracens. But while these studies are a source of pleasure to those who know how to distinguish style from style in architecture, the Churches of Palermo are still more worthy of consideration as being the only repositories of the art-treasures of a very interesting period. For the student of sacred art will find there an opportunity, which can be found nowhere else, of observing how doctrine was taught by pictures in the Greek Church of the twelfth century. It is in Palermo that the best evidences of the Greek traditions of art have been preserved. Palermo having borrowed from Constantinople has amply repaid the debt, and has done for Constantinople that which

Constantinople has not been able to do for itself. The mosaics of Palermo, interesting as examples of the best art of the twelfth century, are inestimably precious as traditions of the sacred art of the Greeks. The Norman Churches of Palermo, though built for Latin use, were furnished with mosaic pictures which were purely Greek.

All the credit of the design and execution of these works belongs therefore to the Greeks, who brought their knowledge with them from home. The defects also are the defects of their school. The subjects and the mode of treating them would have been familiar to those who knew the Churches of Constantinople as they appeared in the time of the Comnenian princes. These mosaics were not a new experiment tried in Palermo for the first time; they were the fruits of an inheritance derived from early ages. They were not the revival of an art which had fallen into disuse; they were the continuation of a living tradition. They are the links which connect Christian art as it was in the time of the Iconoclasts with the art of Giotto and Fra Angelico.

The first Church to visit in point of importance is the Church of the palace, which was built and decorated about the year 1150. On entering the Church the visitor sees nothing distinctly except the columns and arches which are nearest to him. By degrees, as the dimness clears away, he finds himself in a Church small certainly but exceedingly beautiful, with roof walls and pavement richly adorned with gold and colour. The walls are completely jewelled

with mosaics which are illustrations of scenes taken from the Old and New Testaments.

These interesting monuments have rarely been examined as carefully as they deserve to be. They have rarely or never been examined with reference to their bearing upon art and theology at the same time. Visitors are, in general, content to give them a cursory glance, accompanied perhaps with an expression of astonishment that so much of the Bible should have been exhibited on the walls of a Church built in the dark ages.

To describe all these scenes would be to describe a gallery of pictures. It is enough to notice those which are most to the purpose.

The attention is first directed naturally to the tribune or apse, the place of dignity and honour. The upper part of it is occupied by a colossal half-length of Christ, dressed in a mantle of imperial purple or blue thrown over a tunic of cloth of gold. He looks upon the congregation, with His right hand He gives the blessing according to the Greek rite, and in His left He holds the open Bible. The majesty of this figure of our Saviour seems to imply that He alone reigns without an equal.

In the space below the figure of Christ we should have expected to see the Virgin and Child attended by Angels and Saints. And probably that subject formerly occupied the ground; but from some cause the original mosaic has disappeared, and its place has been filled by a Madonna which at once betrays the age to which it belongs. The figure which we

see is not the honest restoration of an older mosaic, it is a vile substitute. The Virgin is seen at full length seated on a handsome chair furnished with a cushion of rich materials. The figure is not very badly designed ; the dress is copied from that which the Virgin wears in other mosaics, though the colours of it are weaker than those of the older examples. The picture is a feeble imitation of the style of earlier times. It has neither the delicacy and finish of modern art, nor the simplicity and truthfulness of ancient art.

But that which is the strongest condemnation of the work is this, that the Virgin is represented as sitting there at leisure without the Child. That she might be the support of the Child was the only reason why she was ever brought forward out of her natural retirement to occupy a conspicuous place. The Madonna filling the middle space in the tribune, seated there in state before the eyes of the people, and yet without the Child, is a thing without example in the history of sacred art. They, who did their best in this modern mosaic to banish the idea of the Incarnation from the mind of the worshipper, could hardly have had the audacity to hope that their miserable attempt would pass for a genuine work of the twelfth century. It was in vain that they affected to imitate the style, when they endeavoured to corrupt the doctrine, of the age of King Roger. "Clouds without rain" and "wells without water" are figures too weak to give an idea of the emptiness and deceitfulness of those who would separate the Mother

from the Child. It is something worse than a solecism in art to place the Virgin on a throne without the Child; it is an immoral use of the means which ought to have been employed for the glory of God and the edification of the Church. Let the censure of honourable art for ever lie upon the unfaithful painter, who used his pencil to betray the sacred truth which was confided to his care.

On the spandrils of the arch which opens to the altar is the grand subject of the Annunciation, so that he who looks up the Church has a view of it. A similar place was given to the same subject in the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus in Rome. The treatment of the subject in the Chapel of King Roger is well worthy of attention. It is not unlike that of the Annunciation in the Church just named. But, as the work in Palermo is two centuries and a half later, it is more perfect in design and in execution.

On the spandril to the left of the spectator Gabriel is seen with expanded wings, and with long white garments floating in the air, as if he was just alighting upon earth. Around his head is the aureole. With his right hand he makes the sign of the benediction in the Greek manner, as if to say BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, and in his left hand he holds the wand of office. All this is perfectly consistent with Scripture; for, if Gabriel is winged, Angels are said in the Apocalypse to fly, and the action of his hand corresponds with the words which he pronounced, and the wand which he carries seems to denote that

he came as an authorised messenger to execute an important mission. The conventional treatment which the painter followed did not in any respect exceed the letter or the spirit of the Scriptures.

On the spandril to the right of the spectator the Virgin Mary is seen, dressed in hood mantle and vesture of religious form and of imperial purple. She is shod with sandals on her bare feet, an unusual thing with her, but here a sign of religious strictness. There is a golden cross on the hood over the forehead, and one on each shoulder, and gold lace along the edge of the mantle. This dress is the conventional dress as it had been improved in Constantinople; the form of it is that of a nun, the colour that of an empress. The Virgin has the aureole about her head. She stands before a seat covered with a cushion, from which she seems to have risen in haste. She raises her right hand in surprise, for when she saw Gabriel "she was troubled at his saying." In her left hand she holds the distaff and spindle, the implements of the innocent toil with which she employed herself during her hours of solitude, and for a moment she ceases from her work that she may listen to the Archangel.

The hand of God is seen above stretched forth from heaven. A ray of light proceeds from the hand to the Virgin, and in the ray the Dove is seen descending with the aureole around its head.

The Virgin Mary is taken by surprise with the distaff and spindle in her hand. No such incident as this is mentioned in Scripture, where in fact

nothing is written concerning the private life of the Virgin. The story, however, is found in the Protevangelium or apocryphal gospel ascribed to St. James. It is there related that, when a veil was required for the temple, Mary with six other virgins undertook to supply the thread or yarn necessary, and the task of spinning the purple thread was allotted to Mary.

The Protevangelium itself is of very great antiquity; and, although it is apocryphal and contains legendary matter, it was not composed for the purpose of supporting any corrupt doctrine. Tischendorf refers to it in an important treatise lately written by him; and he points out that Origen mentions it by name, and that Justin Martyr quotes from it. He therefore concludes that it was written in one of the first decades of the second century. "Uns hat sich als Resultat aufgedrängt, dass das Protevangelium Jacobi ebenso wie die Acta Pilati in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 2. Jahrhunderts verfasst sein müssen."*

The story of the purple thread was accepted by the artist, who could not suppose that the Virgin could ever have been surprised in absolute inactivity. Let no one in these days of artificial refinement and of improved machinery smile at this picture of patriarchal life. Perhaps such a treatment of the subject has passed away for ever, but it was natural in the early and middle ages. The only way known in ancient times of converting wool and flax into cloth

* *Wann wurden unsere Evangelien verfasst*, p. 30.

was the use of the distaff and spindle. Few people in England have ever had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with this primitive method of making thread ; and even the spinning-wheel of the country village has given way to the more powerful and expeditious mode of working for the million by means of [the machinery of the factory ; though the old-fashioned way of spinning may be seen in almost every Sicilian cottage, and in some Sicilian houses of the better class. But the distaff and spindle were once classical. When the Fates were painted on Etruscan vases as engaged in spinning the thread of destiny, Clotho held the distaff. And even princesses of virtuous life were not too proud to employ themselves with their maids in this domestic labour. The title of spinster, as denoting an honourable period of life, was not in its origin a conventional title merely ; it was correctly used in its literal acceptance. The Virgin Mary could not have been more becomingly employed according to the feeling of the early and middle ages.

And this employment of the Virgin carries us back to the idea expressed on the sarcophagi in the Lateran museum, where Eve holds the fleece of wool in token of the labour assigned to woman. The artist might indeed have represented the Virgin engaged in some employment of higher pretensions. He might have shown her, for example, studying the prophecies of Isaiah, or paying her devotions at a faldstool. Zacharias was engaged in the duties of his office when Gabriel appeared to him. And the

sacredness of the time and place seems to add solemnity to the announcement made to him by the Angel. But nothing of that kind is related in the history of the Annunciation. To have put a book into the hands of the Virgin and to have painted her engaged in devotion would have seemed like an artful method of arranging a surprise. More will be said on that head hereafter. The artist of the twelfth century was content with the tradition which represented the Virgin as engaged in the most innocent occupation of a woman's life.

The figures of the Virgin and of Gabriel are of large size and well formed, and though rather stiff they are full of dignity; the faces are good, and the hands are particularly well drawn.

This Annunciation is an exceedingly good specimen of the art of the day. The subject was not new to art; it had been brought by the experience of five or six centuries to the degree of perfection which we see. As a painting the work has its faults, the faults of the Greek school. The laws of light and shade were not then known, and the composition has in consequence the flatness of a Greek painting. Finer pictures of the Annunciation may easily be found, and there will be many occasions to speak of such. But, alas, as the art of painting improved, the pure doctrine of the early centuries became corrupt in more than an equal proportion. And of the numerous Annunciations, which have been painted with far more brilliance of effect, there is none which surpasses this as a faithful picture of scriptural truth.

Taken altogether as a work beautiful in design and reverential in treatment, this deserves to be ranked very highly among the works of sacred art.

The mosaic is in good preservation, though somewhat impaired in colour, and it has never been corrupted by alterations.

As a companion subject to the Annunciation the Presentation of Christ in the temple appears on the spandrels of the arch opposite, and it is in sight to him who looks down the Church from the altar. The figures are as large as in the Annunciation. On one side of the arch is the Virgin Mary dressed in the religious habit of hood and mantle, which are made of cloth of crimson and gold, with a vesture beneath of imperial purple. She holds the Child, who stretches out His arms to Simeon. On the other side of the arch Simeon, an old man in white clothing, with white hair and beard, stretches out his arms to receive the Child. The turtledoves do not appear, nor Anna the prophetess. The subject is not in fact the Purification; it is the Hypapante, as the Greek Church calls it, or the meeting of the Virgin and Child with Simeon, whose eyes saw the Lord's salvation, and who declared that the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel were come with the Child whom he held in his arms. Over the arch is the temple of Jerusalem with the title of the subject thus written, *Η ΠΑΠΑΝΤΙ*.

This mosaic also is of good art and in fair preservation.

The next subject which demands attention is the

Nativity. This mosaic is very large, and the treatment of the subject is curious. The Virgin reclining on a couch is dressed in religious hood, mantle, and vesture, all of cloth of gold ; she wears shoes of vermillion, and she has the aureole about her head. The Child is laid near her, wrapped in swaddling clothes, with the cruciform aureole about His head even in His most tender age. A ray of light proceeding upwards from Him terminates in a star as a guide to the Wise Men. He is laid, not in a manger, but upon what seems to be a small building, which perhaps is intended to stand for the city of Bethlehem. The traditional ox and ass are there to represent the idea of the manger. The scene is laid in the open country, and the Mother and Child are under the cover of a rocky grotto. This arrangement of the scene agrees with the Protevangelium or apocryphal gospel ascribed to St. James, which, as it has been observed, represents a very ancient tradition. St. Luke gives no information concerning the precise spot where Christ was born. The Wise Men, according to St. Matthew, were guided to a house, but the Shepherds were merely directed to Bethlehem. The manger, of which St. Luke speaks, was probably a moveable basket, which might have been set in a field as easily as anywhere else. The historian could relate the action without describing the scene ; but the painter was obliged to choose his position and to paint either house or landscape, and he has not placed the Child in a building attached to the inn, but under the shelter of a cavern. Joseph sits reposeing

at a short distance. He has the aureole ; and, as it is important to note the colours which he wears, he is dressed in a mantle of white, and a blue tunic striped on each side with gold. The Shepherds are coming to the grotto conducted by an Angel. The Child appears a second time in the foreground ; and the females who are preparing the bath for Him are made small in size not from faulty perspective, but as a mode of denoting their inferiority. The three Magi are seen galloping over the plain in the distance, and they are introduced again in the foreground presenting their gifts to Christ.

The difficulty was to unite two points of time in the same picture. The Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi were, according to the Greek Church, subjects equally appropriate to the Nativity of our Lord.

The grand object set forth in this mosaic is the Birth of Christ. From Him the star proceeds, and to Him alone worship is offered. And the Virgin, as being the chief instrument in the mystery of the Incarnation, is there in religious dress of the richest and most honourable material.

In the flight into Egypt the Virgin, dressed as before in cloth of gold with vermilion shoes, rides on a white ass. Joseph, dressed in blue tunic and white mantle, walks by the side of the Virgin, leading the ass and carrying the Child who is dressed in gold. All have the aureole, that of Christ being marked with the Cross. A man-servant, in the Byzantine dress of the twelfth century and with no mark of

sanctity, walks behind, and carries a bundle over his shoulder at the end of a stick.

There is no particular doctrine illustrated in this mosaic, but the traditions of sacred art are well exemplified in it, and the composition of the picture is a fair specimen of the art-power of the day. The subject has always continued to be a favourite, and with a little variation it has been called the Repose in Egypt and the Holy Family.

Joseph appears again on the walls of the Chapel as a single figure among the Saints of the Church. His dress, which never varies, was determined by rule and not by the fancy of the artist. He is represented as an old man dressed in white mantle, blue tunic, and sandals. The value and significance of these colours will be explained hereafter.

High up in the cupola and looking down from the roof is another colossal half-length of our Saviour. He is dressed in imperial purple and gold, without secular fashion or ornament, and He blesses in the Latin manner. Below Him on the wall of the cupola are ranged the hierarchy of heaven, eight Archangels and Angels.

Although this group has no especial reference to the Virgin, it helps to illustrate the rules of sacred art which determined the colours of dress. The Angels wear the attire of the court of Constantinople together with their wings, and their degrees of dignity are denoted with exactness by the colours which were prescribed by the rules of the palace. For art could not find a more convenient and in-

telligible mode of denoting the degrees of rank among Angels than the use of those distinctions which had been invented to mark similar degrees of rank in the ceremonious court of Constantinople. Michael the prince of the Archangels wears the purple dalmatic of kings with boots of vermillion. Gabriel the next in order wears a shorter tunic of white, a brown mantle, green pantaloons, and vermillion boots. Raphael wears a blue tunic, a white mantle, black or dark pantaloons, and the usual scarlet boots. Uriel wears a similar court dress of colours peculiar to his rank. There are four other Angels dressed in the costume of office, two of them in Persian or Oriental dresses with turbans, and all of them with the scarlet boots. Archangels and Angels stand around the throne of their Lord doing the duty of officers in waiting, and dressed in the costume of a worldly court.

In the reign of the Emperor Alexius Comnenus, which lasted from the year 1081 to the year 1118, new rules of ceremony were established in the imperial household. That Emperor invented titles for the secondary branches of his family, and he assigned to each branch the privilege of a colour to denote the order of precedence. Gibbon says, "The Emperor alone could assume the purple or red buskins;" "instead of red the buskins of the Sebastocrator and Cæsar were green."* Gibbon is slightly in error. If he had spoken of other parts of the dress, his

* Gibbon, ch. LIII.

remarks concerning the distinction of colour would have been correct : but, if he spoke of boots, he was mistaken, for all equally wore the vermilion boots. These fashions were in full vigour in Constantinople when the royal Chapel of Palermo was built. And in obedience to these fashions, while Michael is attired like an emperor, or the son of an emperor, Gabriel wears the dress of an emperor's brother.

They who would understand the sacred art of the middle ages must pay attention to these particulars : because the Saints also as well as the Angels were clothed in the same colours as the courtiers according to their degrees of dignity. Thus St. Joseph, as it has been stated, wears the colours of the third degree, blue and white, the colours of Raphael. But while Raphael, standing near the throne, wears the embroidered and tight-fitting garments of the court, Joseph wears flowing garments shaped according to the grave and sober fashion of a Saint.

Sanctity is marked by the form and not by the colour of the garment worn. Holy women of the New Testament though frequently distinguished by a colour of dignity, green or blue, are invariably dressed in a habit of religious form. Tabitha, and the women around her, are represented in this Chapel in the dress of persons of a religious order. Martha and Mary, in the raising of Lazarus, wear the common brown habit of nuns, precisely the same as that which has been noticed as the dress of the Virgin in the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus in Rome.

The scarlet shoes, though commonly given to the

Virgin, were a mark of dignity, not of sanctity. Thus, while Peter and Paul show the sandaled feet of Saints, Nero, who acts as judge between them and Simon Magus, wears the scarlet buskins of an emperor.

The gay apparel, which is allotted to Angels to mark the degrees of rank and precedence, seems to be a partial return to those worldly ornaments which were cast off by the good judgment of Christian artists about two centuries before. But this return was only temporary. A new fashion of the court had sprung up, which for a while was introduced into the Church. The powers and principalities of heaven were represented under the similitude of the courts of Constantinople and Palermo. It is natural to the man who is without experience to compare great things with small, a comparison which always seems absurd and childish to those who are more advanced in knowledge. The Sicilians were taught to think that the throne-room of Palermo was of all things on earth that which bore the nearest resemblance to the majesty of heaven, an idea which made loyalty and piety work in alliance together. But Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints, are never shown in worldly ornaments. Although they are painted in the colours of dignity, they are always dressed in habits of religious form, and this rule after it had been once established was never again abandoned. Angels alone, at the time of the Comneni, wore dresses shaped according to the fashion of the court, and that only when they stood in attendance around the

throne, not in the scenes of the Annunciation or the Nativity. Sacred art in the twelfth century borrowed the customs of royalty. Sacred art borrowed the fleeting shadows of earthly grandeur, and gave them permanence on the walls of the Church. The Byzantine empire has passed away, and no traces of its courtly ceremonies remain except the colours in which its lordly personages were dressed, and these have become fixed in the traditions of sacred art. Strange as it may seem, the tints and hues of the court of Alexius Comnenus are reflected in works of sacred art executed in the most brilliant Italian times, and they are still in use at the present day.

The mosaics of the Chapel of Roger afford abundant food for reflection. It appears from these Greek pictures of the twelfth century that the Virgin Mary is painted only as the Mother of Jesus Christ, with no independent glory of her own, with no pretensions to a share in the work of redemption. She is never seen except in connexion with the Child. The walls of the Chapel were spacious enough for unscriptural legends tending to promote Virgin-worship, if the state of the public belief had required such things as a necessary part of the furniture of the Church. The walls are enriched with such mosaic pictures as were most in accordance with the belief and usage of that period. And the scenes are purely scriptural. One or two only, which have reference to Simon Magus, can be considered as exceeding the letter of Scripture; and even these have the countenance of early Christian writers, and seem

to rest on the authority of Scripture itself, which testifies that Simon bewitched the people with his sorceries. All the other mosaics form a vast gallery of pictures, which are in strict accordance with Scripture. The stranger who visits this Chapel will probably be astonished to find that sacred art could be so free from superstition in the Greek Church of the twelfth century.

But, when credit is claimed for the faithfulness of Greek art, it is not to be denied that errors were prevalent among the people. No Christian land was free from ignorance and superstition in that age. Still, whatever superstitious ideas and practices may have existed outside the Church, it was no small merit to keep the Creed and ritual of the Church free from false doctrine. Unless we had known from other sources that the age was ignorant and superstitious, we could not have discovered it from the old mosaics in the Chapel of King Roger. On the other hand, we have good proof that the people of those times had scriptural truth not only conveyed to their ears, but also brought before their eyes, by the care of those who built their Churches.

It must be confessed that the Greeks had very much to learn in the art of painting. The Greek school was very deficient in many branches of science which later schools have cultivated with success. The Greeks had no theory of light and shade, and they were quite ignorant of perspective. These faults must be excused in an age of painting which may be called the heroic age. The conceptions of

the mind came first, the study of chiaroscuro and perspective followed, just as the rules of the rhetorician came later than poetry and eloquence. The Greek art of the middle ages was rude and grand. To comprehend it we must not expect to find a *chef-d'œuvre*, a gem of art, we must look at a Church covered with mosaic from end to end.

Art had repeated itself with little change from early times, and no innovations tending to corrupt the faith had been permitted to appear. It has been said by some that Greek art became mechanical, that is, that the Greeks copied the old models in a careful manner without originality of thought and without diversity of style. It is true that the strictness of orthodoxy forbade all rashness in handling sacred matters, and that the backwardness of the times limited art to a few known rules. It is true that in the mosaics which we are considering we do not see differences of style, we cannot distinguish the touch of one hand from that of another. The illustrations of the Bible that we see in Palermo seem to be the work of one mind and of one hand. They are like the Iliad. The style of the individual is not impressed on his share of the work, and the feeling of the individual does not make itself transparent in the spirit of his painting.

When all painted alike, we forget the artists and think only of the work. This uniformity of manner was not without a certain advantage in sacred art, where all was conventional, and where variety meant novelty. It was a merit to have no style. Wherever

the worshipper went, the same objects and the same style met his view. Greek painters used art as the means of setting forth a religious idea, keeping themselves all the while out of sight; later artists, on the contrary, have made use of religious subjects as occasions of showing their power, and of putting themselves before the public. But sacred art demands a certain sacrifice on the part of the artist, and private ambition must give way to the general good.

If it had been said as a reproach to the artists of Constantinople that they were too tenacious of the traditions of their fathers, they might have replied that this tenacity was the first point of conscience with them. Art in Constantinople worked in strict subordination to authority. Servility in art, to call it by its worst name, was faithfulness to the cause of truth. An ill-regulated liberty might have favoured innovation in doctrine among the Greeks, as it did afterwards in Italy. Private judgment and private ambition are as fatal to the truth in painting as in preaching. Would that it had been possible to combine consummate excellence in painting with unvarying truth in doctrine! Would that it had been possible to add Italian excellence in painting to the orthodoxy of the Greek artist!

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHURCH OF THE ADMIRAL.

THE Church second in interest in Palermo, and the first in point of age, is the little Church now called the Martorana, built by George of Antioch, Admiral or Emir to King Roger, and dedicated by him to the Virgin Mary. It is built in the form of a Greek cross, and it is richly decorated with mosaics. It was finished in the year 1143. George was of the Greek Church, and he may be said to have introduced Greek art into Palermo.

We look in vain for the usual figure of Christ in the tribune, for that part of the Church has been demolished in modern times to make way for alterations which perhaps were considered to be improvements.

In the cupola, high above all, is Christ on a throne surrounded by Angels. That subject seems to have found its proper place in the upper regions ; for the cupola was an indispensable part of a Greek Church, and it seemed to be made expressly to receive the best representation possible of the company of heaven. Unfortunately the want of light does not favour the work of the artist.

Below the cupola, on the spandrils of the arch

which opens to the altar, is the Annunciation, for that conspicuous place seems to have been reserved for this subject in every Church as a well understood rule. Gabriel, with outspread wings, comes flying on that side, which is to the right of the altar and to the left of the spectator, to execute his mission. With his right hand stretched forth he makes the sign of the benediction in the Greek manner, and in the other hand he holds the wand of office. He wears the long white robes of an Angel, which trail behind him as he moves rapidly through the air. The Virgin, on the corresponding side of the arch, stands before the chair attired in the usual religious dress of hood, mantle, and under-garment, all of imperial purple edged with gold lace. She raises her right hand in surprise, and in her left she holds the distaff and spindle, as in the royal Chapel. The hand of the Almighty is seen above; a ray of light proceeds from it to the Virgin, and in the ray the Dove is seen flying.

On the arch opposite is the Purification, or, to speak more correctly, the Hypapante. The Virgin, in the usual dress, holds the Child, who reaches forth His arms to meet those of Simeon. •

The treatment of these two subjects is precisely the same in this Church as in the Chapel of the palace. It seems as if these two great subjects, the Annunciation and the Presentation of Christ, were set face to face in the same position in every Church. The construction of the Greek Churches afforded places well adapted to the subjects, and the traditions

of painting accommodated themselves to the traditions of architecture.

The Nativity of Christ and the Death of the Virgin are the largest pictures in this Church. They are on the roof or vault of the Church, and that also is a remarkable feature. In Latin Churches, which were built without cupola, it was usual to decorate the apse and the walls; but in Greek Churches the cupola and the roof might also be covered with pictures.

In the Nativity the Virgin, dressed as usual in imperial purple, reclines on a couch, and near her lies the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes. That upon which He is laid is not a manger or cradle, but a small low building, which perhaps is meant for the town of Bethlehem. The ox and the ass are present as usual. From the Child a stream of light runs upwards and terminates in a star. That idea was familiar to Greek art; cases in which it is expressed have been mentioned as occurring in the Menologium of Basil and in the royal Chapel; and when Correggio painted his Nativity with light emanating from the body of the Holy Child, and shining on the persons who stood around, he did not paint an idea entirely his own, but one borrowed from an old tradition. Joseph sits alone on one side. The heavenly host are seen flying above. In the foreground two females prepare a bath for the Child, while an Angel conducts the Shepherds. The treatment is precisely the same as in the royal Chapel, except that here the Wise Men are not introduced. The figures are all as large as life.

The most remarkable mosaic in the Church is the Death or Sleep of the Virgin. It deserves especial attention, for it is a grand example of a subject no longer painted, and it is the earliest example which has been preserved to the present time.

The Virgin Mary is laid upon a richly furnished couch, dressed in hood and mantle of purple closely wrapped around her. The dress has the usual gold lace along the edge, a golden cross on the hood, the same on each shoulder and on each of the cuffs. The Virgin lies motionless, with her eyes closed and her hands crossed on her breast. The point of time is that at which Mary breathed her last. Jesus Christ stands behind the couch on which the Virgin has expired, richly dressed in purple mantle and tunic of cloth of gold, and having the cruciform aureole about His head. He has received into His arms the soul of Mary, swathed as a little child, and He is in the act of turning round to bear it away. Two ministering Angels hover above. The Apostles are gathered round the couch of Mary. One of them bends down over her shoulder, probably to receive her last words, and he is known to be Peter. Another embraces her foot, which is covered with the vermillion shoe, and he is John. The rest stand around gazing on the lifeless form of Mary, not making lamentation, but with looks full of respect and trust. They do not perceive the presence of Christ nor the departing soul of Mary. Spiritual substances are invisible to them, and their eyes are fixed upon the lifeless remains. They doubt not,

but they do not see. This idea is beautifully expressed in the picture. Mary and the soul of Mary have the aureole, but not the Apostles.

The composition of this remarkable picture is exceedingly good. The figures are as large as life. That of our Lord as He carries away the soul of the Virgin is full of dignity and drawn with much force. The attitudes of the Apostles are varied and all of them good.

The treatment of the subject in this picture corresponds precisely with the account of the Sleep of Mary, which may be read in the *Menologium* of Basil: and, if the Festival had been illustrated with a miniature in that calendar, there is no doubt that it would have been similar to the mosaic which we see in the Martorana. Although this is the earliest example extant in our times of the Sleep of the Virgin, yet we cannot doubt that the subject had been frequently treated in this manner in Constantinople and other parts of the East; and we know that it continued to be so treated by Greek and Italian artists down to the time of Fra Angelico and later. How many pictures of the Sleep of the Virgin have perished through age, how many have been broken, burnt, and effaced by violence, cannot be guessed. But there is reason to think that as early as the tenth, and perhaps as early as the ninth or even the eighth century, the Sleep of Mary was expressed in painting by the departure of the soul of Mary into the hands of her Son and her God.

The spirit of the Blessed Virgin is represented in

the form of a little child. This idea is now uncommon, and perhaps it may seem even a little fantastical to the eyes of the present generation. But it is a very appropriate idea ; for it was not a deathbed that was painted, it was a birthday, it was the entrance of a blessed soul into a new and glorious condition. The grand truth is that Christ Himself received the soul of Mary. This is all that the Greeks knew of the Assumption ; and as they wrote of it in the Menologium, so they painted it in the Martorana.

This fine picture has been well preserved to this day, and it is an example of the power and durability of works of art as monuments. It has resisted the effects of time, which has seen so many changes in the Church. This picture, which was composed with the single view of adorning the Church which George of Antioch dedicated to the Virgin, fulfils a destiny which was never contemplated by those who gave the order for the execution of it ; and it remains in its place to protest, with all the strength of the age to which it belongs, against the corruptions of modern times, and to tell the difference between early and later art. All the later pictures of the Assumption added together, however they may agree in their tale, cannot have the weight of this faithful witness.

This mosaic is not only the most ancient but also the largest picture of the subject in existence. It has not been brought into notice and studied as much as so rare and curious a work deserves to be. Such a work in central Europe would have been

famous; in Palermo it is almost out of sight. A copy of this interesting mosaic would be worthy of a place in any museum of Christian antiquities.

As this Church was dedicated to the Virgin, the pictures, as it might naturally have been expected, have especial reference to her history. Portraits of her parents, whose names or supposed names were Joachim and Anna, were not forgotten on so important an occasion. Joachim has the usual distinction of the aureole, and he wears a tunic of light blue with a white mantle over it. These colours were not chosen at the caprice of the artist; they are the colours worn by the Archangel Raphael, the colours belonging to the third order in the scale of dignity. It may be observed that the colours of Joachim are the same as those which were assigned to Joseph, denoting the dignity of a prince of the imperial family, but not of an emperor.

Anna, the mother of the Virgin, appears in robes of greater dignity. The fashion of her dress is that of a religious order, and she has the aureole. Her hood and mantle are made of the richest material, for they are of cloth of crimson and gold, gold in the higher lights, crimson in the shadows. The cloth, which this mosaic represents, seems to have been made of crimson silk and gold woven together, in some lights appearing to be all crimson, in others all gold. St. Anna is the only person, except Christ and the Virgin, who appears in this costly material. To have given it to Joachim would have been to make him like Christ.

To attempt to portray the parents of the Virgin is to attempt to paint her genealogy in acknowledgment of her descent from the house of David. This opens a difficult question. It is possible that Joachim and Heli, who is mentioned in St. Luke, may be the same person, the two names being equivalent.* There is no certainty that the names Joachim and Anna are correct. Yet no evil can arise from the introduction of figures intended to represent the father and mother of the Virgin, so long as nothing miraculous and supernatural is signified by them. The parents of the Virgin seem to be placed before the eyes of the congregation for the purpose of indicating that she inherited from her father those rights by virtue of which Christ was the Son of David. And this is a most important doctrine, whatever be the weakness of the means by which it is taught. The genealogy of the Virgin signifies the connexion between Christ and David, and the attempt to illustrate that connexion cannot be called superstitious.

And there is a certain utility in the introduction of Joachim and Anna as the means of showing that the birth of Mary was not different from that of all other descendants of our first parents. In this sense Joachim and Anna represent a great truth, and they help to exclude erroneous opinions concerning the birth of Mary. As in Greek art we have the Sleep of Mary instead of the modern doctrine of the Assump-

* See the Article of the Rev. F. Meyrick, "On the Virgin Mary," in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*.

tion, so we have the Genealogy of Mary instead of the Immaculate Conception. The early traditions of sacred art tend to prove that the Virgin, being of the house of David, was in no way different from other children of Adam.

There was an advantage in commemorating the names of Joachim and Anna, if they aided in stopping the way against the intrusion of strange doctrines. The time was coming when the moderate doctrine of the Conception of the Virgin was no longer deemed sufficient, and when the Immaculate Conception was pressed forward into notice. And therefore it is important to observe that in these mosaics there is no allusion to that exemption from original sin in the solitary case of the Virgin, which has lately been made a dogma necessary to salvation in the Roman Catholic Church. At the very time when the Admiral built his Church, St. Bernard wrote against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which was beginning to make its way in some parts of the West. As soon as that doctrine had well established itself, Joachim and Anna became superfluous; they were found to be inconvenient rather than otherwise; they were accordingly dropped out of the traditions of art, and they disappeared from the walls of Latin Churches.

In making the alterations by which this beautiful Church has been improved or damaged in later times, much of the wall, which was entirely covered with mosaic, has been demolished, and posterity can never know what monuments have been crumbled

away. Two exceedingly curious mosaics, however, have been saved from destruction and affixed to the wall again, though not in their original places. One represents the coronation of King Roger by Jesus Christ; in the other George the Admiral is seen making the oblation of his Church to the Virgin Mary.

In the first our Lord stands wearing robes of the usual purple with scarlet shoes, an exception to the general rule, since He is commonly painted with the sandals of the religious orders. He has the cruciform aureole. With His right hand He places the crown on the head of King Roger. The King stands to receive the crown, attired in the royal dalmatic of purple embroidered with golden crosses, and confined around him with a sash or belt of gold, called by Ducange the *lorum*, which passes over his shoulders and round his waist. He is dressed in the princely costume of the times, and he wears the vermilion buskins.

To say that Roger was crowned by Christ is as much as to say that he held his crown by the grace of God, that he was an independent sovereign, and that he acknowledged no superior on earth. It is not pretended that the coronation of Roger by the hand of Christ was a real act, or that Christ ever appeared in living form to grant the kingdom to Roger. Nor yet is the scene a mere dream or vision. In some sense the coronation was substantially true. It represented a fact, and it must be understood symbolically to mean that Roger was a king by divine providence, and was

tributary to no one. The scene was imagined by the artist as the mode of expressing a truth which could not be made visible to the eye. And there is no difficulty in accepting the scene painted as a figure or symbol denoting the rights of King Roger.

The companion mosaic is still more curious. The Virgin stands wearing the usual dress of religious form and purple colour, and the vermillion shoes. Around her head is the usual aureole. The Admiral George, a very badly drawn figure, is prostrate on the ground in true Oriental style at the feet of the Virgin. He is dressed in a scarlet mantle striped with gold. A few words written above him explain that he is making his request or petition to the Virgin; and she holds in her hand a paper which is an intercession on behalf of the Admiral made by her to Christ, or to the Word as she calls him. Christ is seen in the sky, dressed in golden raiment and making the sign of the benediction.

In explaining this picture it would not be just to give to it a signification beyond that which is expressed in the companion picture. It would not be just to come hastily to the conclusion that this picture represents an act of Virgin-worship really done by the living man George of Antioch. It does not follow of necessity that George actually prostrated himself before the Virgin because he is here painted in that posture. It seems as if the prostrate figure of George was intended only as an expression of the sentiments which he felt in his heart when he built this Church and dedicated it to the Virgin. It was

difficult to represent in painting the offer of the Church made by George and accepted by the Virgin. The religious feelings of devotion and gratitude could not be reduced to shape and placed upon the wall except by showing the man himself prostrate on the ground in an act of adoration. And the dedication of a Church to sacred purposes and to the memory of the Virgin Mary could be made manifest only by painting the Virgin herself as present to receive the offering made to her. It may be questioned how far it was in accordance with good taste to make the attempt at all, but there seems to be no other way of expressing the idea intended. Symbolical painting was the only means by which such an act could be expressed by the painter. The picture of the prostrate Admiral represents a scene which could not have taken place except in imagination. It is not pretended that the Virgin appeared palpably to the Admiral, and that he threw himself down on the ground before her. Still less is it supposed that the Admiral is offering his Church to an image or picture of the Virgin. The artist gave a bodily shape to the idea of his mind, and in painting the figurative dedication of the Church he painted a fit companion to the figurative coronation of Roger. The presence of the Virgin must be considered to be as imaginary in this picture as that of Christ in the other. As, when Roger is crowned, no more is meant than that he holds his crown from Christ alone and reigns by the favour of the King of kings, so, when George falls prostrate and dedicates his church to the Virgin, no

more is meant than that he makes this offering in humility of heart. Both pictures are symbolical. The actions painted are not to be taken literally, but only as significant of that which could not be presented to the eye.

Certainly no one ever made a beautiful offering and offered it with more abasement of self than George of Antioch. He does not boast of his deeds, he does not calculate upon his merits, but he prays for the protection of himself and his children, and for the remission of his sins, and he asks for the intercession of the Virgin. If he had been a Puritan, he would have left his Church unbuilt, and he would have renounced the merit of the good works which he had never done. It is to be wished, however, that he had gone directly to the One Mediator, instead of taking the circuitous way of the Roman centurion, who had built a synagogue, and "did not think himself worthy" to go to Christ, but besought others to intercede for him.

There may have been other motives also which determined George to choose the attitude of prostration. Perhaps he was actuated to a certain extent by his loyal and gentlemanly feelings. He had caused his sovereign to be represented erect, because that sovereign was the minister of God on earth, and one of a race which seemed to have been created expressly for the defence of Christendom. George of Antioch lived in the time of the first crusade. George could remember Antioch when it was under the power of the Mahometans; and he saw it rescued from

them, restored to Christendom, and placed under the government of the Norman prince Bohemund. Bohemund and Roger were cousins, grandchildren of a Norman gentleman, Tancred of Hauteville. It was with a kind of religious feeling that George acknowledged such a king as Roger. When George introduced his king and himself into pictures composed as companions to each other, delicacy of feeling directed him to take the lowest place while he gave all honour to his sovereign. He did not desire to gain a little glory at the expense of his king. He did not seek to exalt himself in his own picture. While the king stands erect, the faithful 'emir thinks that he cannot choose a posture too humble.

In these two mosaics we have the likenesses of Roger and of George. The portrait of George gives us a better idea of the mind than of the form of the person. In that odd figure of a man sprawling awkwardly on the ground, turning up his fine old face to see and be seen, showing his white hair and moustache, George has left us the portrait of himself, the portrait of a Christian gentleman of the twelfth century, the portrait of an old man brave, loyal, generous, and devout. In that portrait we read the character of the excellent George of Antioch.

But although we are justified in giving a figurative and not a literal sense to the picture of George prostrate before the Virgin, yet we must believe that he was accustomed, if not to worship the Virgin with bodily prostrations, at least to ask for her intercession in words addressed to her. If he is acquitted of

gross Virgin-worship, yet English Churchmen are bound to say that his invocation of the Virgin with reliance on her aid was "a fond thing vainly invented." We are not obliged to speak in terms of harsh condemnation of the compliance of a good man with the usage of the times, although that usage certainly was not of Apostolical origin. To call such a practice a fond thing is to use the mildest term which could be found. We do not dislike those who are capable of doing fond things; on the contrary we find them to be the most amiable and estimable of men, whose warmth and earnestness are worth much more than the prudence of the stiff and reserved.

Yet, however the picture may be explained, it must be confessed that there is danger in it. The beholder sees the picture of a man worshipping the Virgin; and to the ignorant this would seem to teach prayer to the Virgin with prostration of body. They, who accept things literally, would so understand the example set before them; and the lesson, which would have taught the beholder to do good works in lowliness of mind, would be lost. The spiritual signification would not be understood, and the outward sign would have an injurious effect. Since the generality of men would probably judge of the picture with sensual eyes, it would so far have a bad influence.

And the practice of introducing the inhabitants of this world and of the next into the same picture has undeniable danger in it, a danger which increases as

faith and humility become weaker. The examples of Paschal in Rome and of George in Palermo are early examples of a practice at first comparatively inoffensive. The practice will be seen to grow in later times into one of the worst abuses of sacred art.

CHAPTER X.

THE CATHEDRAL OF MONREALE.

THE grand Church of Monreale, near Palermo, was built by William the Good, and dedicated by him to the Virgin in the year 1174. The interior is rich with colour and gold, the walls being hung with mosaics from one end to the other. According to Mr. Dennis these pictures cover a space of 80,629 square feet, and they are fine examples of the state of the Greek art of those days.* The series begins with the Creation of the world and ends with the descent of the Holy Ghost. The subjects follow one another, group after group, without interruption; there is no frame nor margin between one and another except where a window makes a natural division.

This Church, unlike the Chapel Royal and the Martorana, is as bright as day to him who enters it. The first object which meets the eye is the colossal half length of Christ, which fills the upper part of the tribune or apse, and may be seen from the farthest end of the Church. The head and face are exceedingly majestic and beautiful. The tunic or vesture is of

* Handbook for Sicily, by Mr. G. Dennis, H.M. Consul at Palermo: Murray. Il Duomo di Monreale illustrato da Domenico Benedetto Gravina: Palermo.

cloth of crimson and gold, and a mantle of imperial purple hangs from the shoulders. Christ has the cruciform aureole round His head; with His right hand He makes the sign of the benediction according to the Latin manner, and in His left hand He holds the open Bible.

Christ is supposed to be enthroned in power and glory. Near Him the four Archangels stand in attendance, all dressed in the royal dalmatic confined around them with sash or scarf of gold. The colours of the dalmatics differ according to the right of precedence. The dalmatic of Michael is purple, that of Gabriel green, that of Raphael light blue, that of Uriel red. They all wear the usual buskins of vermillion.

Below the head of Christ is the Virgin at full length seated on a magnificent throne with the Child on her lap. She is dressed in robes of the highest dignity and of religious form. Her mantle and hood are of crimson and gold, her under-dress or vesture is of imperial purple; she has the aureole about her head; and she places upon a footstool her feet covered with shoes of scarlet embroidered with gold. The Child with the cruciform aureole is dressed in bright cloth of gold. The two Archangels Michael and Gabriel stand in attendance one on each side of the throne with aureole and wings; they are clad in dalmatics, Michael in one of purple, and Gabriel in one of green; they wear vermillion boots; and they present to the Child the Orb surmounted with the Cross, emblem of the world subject to

Christ. These figures are all of a size larger than life.

The idea of the tribute of the Orb and the Cross is grand however inadequately it may be expressed, though it must necessarily be much enfeebled by the insufficiency of the manner in which it is set before the view. The great difficulty of sacred art consists in finding any sort of expressions for ideas in their nature too vast for human comprehension. The two great Archangels offer to the Child seated on His Mother's lap the world subdued to the Christian faith, the greatest offering which the highest princes of the hierarchy of heaven could make. They offer to Christ that which is His own. The artist deserves praise for what he intended to do rather than for what he has done. At the time when the mosaics of Monreale were executed there was nothing absurd in the idea of such an offering coming from Archangels dressed in the uniform of the imperial court, though it seems strange, and perhaps ridiculous, to the present generation to see the oblation made by the two Archangels clad one of them in a purple and the other in a green coat and wearing scarlet boots.

Perhaps many of those who visit Palermo have passed through Upper Italy, and have become familiar with the works of art which are kept in the rich galleries of Florence. A picture may there be seen of St. Catherine of Siena offering to the Child an orange, and this picture is by a painter no meaner than Titian. The styles of painting in these two efforts of art are not to be compared, but neither on

the other hand are the ideas which the painters intended to represent.

The grand subject of the Annunciation is seen on the spandrils of the arch which opens to the tribune, for that is the place which custom had assigned to it. Gabriel appears as usual on the side of the arch to the left of the spectator. He is dressed in the flowing robes of an Angel with sandaled feet, and he accompanies his message with the sign of the blessing in the Latin form.

The Virgin is seen on the corresponding side of the arch attired as usual in hood and mantle of cloth of gold and dress of purple with scarlet shoes. She stands before the cushioned seat from which she appears to have just risen. She holds in her left hand the distaff and spindle, the tokens of her occupation, and for a moment she ceases to use them while she listens to the Angel. The ray of light descends from above upon the Virgin, and the Dove comes flying in the ray.

The treatment is precisely the same in all the examples of the Annunciation of this period, and it becomes familiar. The eye has been taught to look for Gabriel and the Virgin on the sides of the arch which respectively belong to them. This treatment so far as sentiment is concerned could not be better.

The entire history of our Lord is depicted in mosaic on the walls of the Church with figures as large as life; and in all the scenes of His history He wears cloth of gold and imperial purple. The Virgin also appears in those scenes in which she is con-

cerned, though there is no attempt made to press her forward unduly into notice. And her garb is always the same, the colours of an empress and the habit of a nun.

In this series the Annunciation occurs again in its place among the other historical scenes, treated nearly as before. Gabriel comes in flying and borne upon a cloud, and he gives the blessing as usual. The Virgin is engaged with her distaff and spindle, and she stands before the tall chair from which she has risen.

In the Visitation the Virgin appears as usual. The dress of Elizabeth is worthy of notice, as being another instance of colours borrowed from the Byzantine court. In form it is the religious dress like that of the Virgin. In colour, the hood and mantle are green, the dress white, and the shoes scarlet. Green is the second colour in the order of precedence.

The Presentation or Hypapante is not different from the pictures of the same subject which have been described.

This is a beautiful assemblage of subjects, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Presentation, each of them with its appropriate hymn or little sacred poem. It is scarcely possible to look at these mosaics, harmonising as they did with the services of the choir below, without meditating on the effect which these appeals through the senses have upon the heart of the worshipper. The language of ordinary life is hardly sufficient to do justice to those scenes from Scripture, which are above all others fit subjects for poetry, painting, and music, and touch

the heart not so much through the intellect as through the imagination and feelings. A commentary in prose on these most beautiful passages of Scripture is scarcely enough to move the soul to that devotion which is worthy of them. Prose is for the explanation of points of doctrine to the slow and backward; prose is for the confutation of heresy; prose is for a dialogue with Trypho the Jew, or for a controversy with Celsus. Dry language is for common use. If there be any utterances which can move all the feelings of the soul, let them have their place in the ritual of the Church to do their share in praising God for the revelation of those mysteries which were past finding out. Music and painting have a holy task, and they may well use all their power to set forth in the most appropriate measures and forms those great mercies which established peace between God and man. The better the music and painting, the better the worship. Themes like the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Presentation, deserve all the honour which the most finished art can do to them. These are occasions on which the most heavenly words were spoken. The announcement made by Gabriel comprehends in few words the whole substance of the Gospel. The song of the Blessed Virgin expresses her gratitude and contentment. The song of Simeon is his last act of praise in acknowledgment of the Lord's salvation which his eyes had seen. Ave Maria, Magnificat, and Nunc dimittis, are the proper hymns for the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Presentation. There could not be more beau-

tiful words for music, nor more beautiful scenes for the pencil.

In the mosaic of the Crucifixion, in which four nails are used according to the older tradition of art, the Virgin takes her place near the Cross with hood and mantle of purple closely drawn round her, and darkened on this occasion to a deep funereal hue, which treatment continued to be followed ever after in this scene. She has the vermilion shoes as usual.

When Christ appears to Mary Magdalene after His Resurrection, she wears religious habits all of green or of the second order with vermilion shoes.

Peter is painted in gravely fashioned clothing of purple and yellow, and John in similar habits of crimson and green; and so of the other personages of sacred history who have a place in art.

And let it not be accounted a frivolous thing to take notice of such niceties as the colour of a coat or the shape of a garment. These trifling matters are examples of the laws which have governed sacred art for eight hundred years and more. The colours which were assigned conventionally to our Lord, to the Virgin, and to the Apostles, were assigned to them in accordance with the rules of the Byzantine court; and when once accepted by the artists of the Greek Church they remained fixed. Any attempt to change the recognised traditions would have been thought unpardonable levity and presumptuousness. The mantle of purple or dark blue, and the tunic of crimson and gold, or of crimson only, have been from the tenth or eleventh century the dress of Christ.

And these colours were well suited to that Person who must always be the most conspicuous figure in every composition in which He appears.

The same colours were assigned to the Virgin for the same reason and with the same effect.

The Apostles also were dressed each in the colours which were assigned to him by rule. And the rule, when once established, became an invariable tradition of art, so that each Apostle could be known at once by the colour of his clothing.

And by a happy coincidence these colours are peculiarly suited to the exigencies of art, and they produce by their own nature the very combinations and contrasts which a painter would most have desired. The Apostles, when they are painted in a group, are not dull subjects for a picture from monotony of colour, like monks of the same fraternity. They afford a variety of tints, which in fact, without moderation in the display of them, would be dangerous from their richness. The purple and yellow of Peter, the crimson and green of John, the various colours proper to the other Apostles, when they are judiciously arranged and massed in a picture, produce effects in colouring which cannot be surpassed. The traditions, which took their origin from the Byzantine court, had an effect upon art for centuries to come, and they remained in force long after the origin of them was forgotten. The same traditions descended without change from the Greek to the Italian schools, and they were accepted by the Florentines and the Venetians. In the Last Supper of Leonardo, in the

Transfiguration of Raphael, in the Raising of Lazarus by Sebastian del Piombo, each Apostle is known at a glance by the colour of his apparel. And the same rules are observed to this day, for the old masters are still followed as the recognised authority in matters of art. The result has been such as could hardly have been expected to spring from so insignificant a cause. These traditions of art may be traced back to the day when imperial commands regulated the colours, which were to be worn in the court of Constantinople.

In a conspicuous part of the Cathedral of Monreale there are mosaics representing the coronation of William the Good, the founder of the Church, and the dedication of the Church to the Virgin by the same king. These mosaics are very similar to those which have been described as representing similar incidents in the Church of the Admiral; but here Christ and the Virgin are seated on thrones. The King, dressed in the usual royal dalmatic, stands before Christ to receive his crown. In the companion picture the King, wearing his crown, approaches the Virgin respectfully, and bending the knee but not kneeling he presents to her the model of his Church, while she from her throne reaches out her hands to receive the offering of William. A hand appearing in the sky gives the benediction. The King is painted half the size of Christ and the Virgin in token of his inferiority. The difference in the attitudes of the King and the Admiral is to be noticed. The King is not prostrate; such a position would seem to be un-

becoming in him, though the Admiral might choose to be so painted in token of subordination. These attitudes prove nothing with respect to Virgin-worship. They serve to illustrate the ideas of the times but not the doctrine of the Church. If we accepted them as indications of doctrine, then we should be obliged to believe that Virgin-worship was less practised by royal families than by the lower grades of society. But these pictures are merely characteristic of the times. While William could appear bending a knee and holding his Church in his hand, George felt himself obliged to appear in the act of complete prostration.

In Messina and Cefalù there are Norman Churches partially decorated with mosaics, which do not differ from those which have been described.

The Cathedral of Messina, though built soon after the conquest of Sicily, remained without mosaics till about the year 1325. In the principal apse there is a very large figure of Christ seated on a throne. He wears the usual dress with sandals, and He has the cruciform aureole with the words *O Ω N* inscribed in it. He holds up His right hand to bless in the Greek manner; and in His left hand He holds the Bible open at the place where it is written in Greek: *COME UNTO ME ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.*

Christ is attended on each hand by an Archangel. These are painted much smaller in size than Christ, and looking towards Him they bow the head. They have wings and the long garments of Angels, for by

this time the court dress seems to have been disused. Beyond them the Virgin stands on one side dressed in the religious dress of purple, and on the other side stands John the Baptist, both of them looking towards Christ with heads inclined.

Near the feet of Christ are three figures very small in size and kneeling down. These are King Frederic of Arragon, who caused the mosaics to be made, Guidotto, the Archbishop of Messina, and King Peter, who is the Peter of Arragon mentioned in *Much Ado about Nothing*. The kings wear the scarlet shoes.

In the apse on the northern side the Virgin is represented in large size, seated on a throne and holding the Child. She is dressed in the usual religious habit of imperial purple, with golden crosses on the forehead and shoulders, and with gold lace along the edge, and she wears vermilion shoes embroidered with gold. The Child, who is dressed in raiment of gold, gives the benediction. On each side of the throne is an Archangel, and next to the Archangels St. Lucia and St. Agatha, Sicilian Saints. The Queens Eleonora and Elizabeth, the consorts of Frederic and Peter, are represented kneeling and very small in size.

The Madonna on the throne holding the Child and attended by Saints is a Greek example of a subject which in later times became one of the most common in Italian art. In this apse the composition does not show that skill in the arrangement of the figures which was attained in later times. The Virgin is placed in the middle, and the other figures smaller

in size stand formally at equal distances from her and from each other. They all seem as if they were placed there merely to cover a certain space in the tribune, and nothing can be much less artistic than the distribution and arrangement of the component parts of the picture. The figures stand apart like so many statues, and they seem to have no relation to each other. Yet the same idea appears repeatedly in an improved form in the pictures of later Italian masters. The Virgin on throne with Saints occurs in every catalogue, and is seen in every gallery. It always continued to be a popular subject. And when it was treated in a more natural manner, with figures well arranged in a group, it made an effective picture. But it has been repeated with little variation even to satiety.

A school of painting began to be formed in Sicily after the arrival of the Greek workers in mosaic; for every work in mosaic was executed after a well-prepared design. A few old paintings may be found here and there, the works of Greeks or of Sicilian pupils of the Greeks.

In the Church of San Gioachino in Messina there is a very small picture of the Sleep of the Virgin, with its title written in Greek *Η ΚΟΙΜΗΣΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ*. It is in its treatment very like the mosaic picture of the same subject in the Martorana in Palermo.

In the same Church of San Gioachino there are two small Greek pictures of the Madonna contemplating the Crucifix on her lap. These pictures are unique.

They represent the idea of the Mother and Child ; but instead of holding the Infant on her knee the Mother holds the image of her crucified Son. The idea of the Virgin's relation to Christ is transferred from the time of His childhood to the time of His Passion. The Virgin in these pictures is a combination of the Mater Dolorosa with the Virgin holding the Child in her arms. The work is Greek, but it is suited to Italian ideas, for the Greeks never had the Crucifix carved in wood or in any other material. The Greeks confined themselves to pictures.

When the trials and vicissitudes of the Church of the East are considered, it must be confessed that it is marvellous that sound doctrine should have been expressed so well and truthfully as it is in the Churches of Sicily.

But the age of reviving art had commenced in Italy. When the mosaics of Messina were executed Giotto had already painted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REVIVAL OF ART IN ITALY.

ITALIAN schools of painting had not yet been founded when the Greek mosaics of Palermo were executed. Art indeed was beginning to show signs of new life in Italy in the twelfth century; but material interests prevailed over matters of taste. The question of investitures was of more importance to the Popes than doctrine taught by pictures, and the wars which raged in Upper Italy were not favourable to Christian art.

There are a few examples of Greek mosaics executed at this period to be seen in Rome. The front of the ancient Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere is nearly covered with mosaic. In the upper part is Christ on a throne. Pope Innocent II. kneels at His feet; an Archangel stands on each side of Him; around Him are the Evangelistic emblems, and over Him is the hand of God. The presence of Innocent is a blemish to the work in point of taste, but it does no great injury to doctrine. On a line below this group are the Virgin and Child on a throne; five Virgins stand on each side of them with lamps, some of which are gone out. Christ and the Virgin

wear the usual dresses. This work was executed by order of Innocent II. in the year 1139.

In the tribune of the same Church there is a mosaic of Christ and the Virgin, executed at the same time as the mosaic on the façade. It is not a group of the Virgin and Child as it would have been in a Greek Church. Christ in full manhood and the Virgin Mary are seated together on the same throne, and it is important to observe that she is placed on His right hand. They are both dressed in golden garments, and the Virgin wears a crown. This idea, which is as yet without example in art, seems to be a perverse application of the words, "Upon Thy right hand did stand the queen in a vesture of gold." The work is an early attempt to raise the Virgin to an equality with Christ, and it is the first indication of the idea of the coronation of the Virgin. The act of coronation is not indeed represented in this case, but the Virgin seems to have been acknowledged already as the Queen of heaven. The Italian idea of the coronation of the Virgin came out of the darkest age, and it now begins to establish itself as a recognised subject in art. The Greek who was engaged to do this work was a traitor to his own Church and to sacred art.

In the tribune of the Church of St. Paul fuori le Mura there is a fine mosaic, which happily escaped destruction when the Church was burnt. Christ occupies the middle place; He is represented very large in size and seated on a throne; He raises one hand to bless, and in the other He holds the Bible

open at the words, COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU. The face of our Saviour is full of majesty, and it is recognised at once as being of the type which is familiar to us at the present day. His name is written in Greek letters by His side. His dress is of the usual form and colour, a mantle of imperial purple or blue, and a tunic of crimson. On His right hand are Paul and Luke, on His left Peter and Andrew.

On one side of this large group there is a group of the Virgin and Child. The Virgin appears with a white hood, a variation from the common usage, and with garments of purple edged with gold. The Child is dressed in garments of gold. The title of the Virgin is thus written under her: REGINA CÆLI MARIA MATER DOMINI. On the corresponding side is John the Baptist with his title PRÆCURSOR DOMINI. This work was executed in the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is Greek; but Roman influence caused the insertion of the title Queen of heaven, unless indeed these words are a later addition.

Art, however, began to struggle for an independent existence in Italy, and schools of native painters arose to meet the demands of the time. There was great activity in Church-building in the northern parts. The Churches were all built in the Gothic or pointed style, which then prevailed throughout Lombardy and Tuscany. The narrow windows admitted a dim light, which was conducive to devotion,

though it was unfavourable to the works of the painter.

Early pictures, painted in those times by Greeks and by Italian pupils of the Greeks, are now to be found in galleries and museums, very rarely in Churches. Examples of such pictures may be seen in the museum attached to the library of the Vatican, and in the galleries of Florence, Siena, and Naples. They are for the most part very small pictures, for large pictures were seldom painted except on walls. They are in many cases diptychs and triptychs, which could be folded together and carried from the sacristy to the altar or from one Church to another. They were not ornaments of the building; they were rather part of the furniture of the altar, to be used in the celebration of the Mass. They do not seem as if they had been painted to delight the eye so much as to suggest devout thoughts.

Few of the painters of those times are known by name. Guido of Siena painted a Madonna and Child, which may still be seen in the Church of San Domenico in that place. It is published in d'Agincourt, and it is praised by Lanzi for the beauty of the countenance of the Virgin. It bears the date 1221, and it has the following inscription on it;—

*Me Guido de Senis diebus depinxit amœnis,
Quem Christus lenis nullis velit angere pœnis.*

where curiously enough the picture is made to pray for Guido.

A mosaic executed in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, in the year 1291, the work of

Jacopo da Turrita, is an excellent example of doctrine illustrated by art in those days. This work was done with the same object as the older mosaics of Sixtus III. in the same Church, and it is a series of scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary.

In the tribune, high above all, is a grand composition of the Coronation of the Virgin, an Italian idea, which now appears completely developed for the first time, though it became from this time forth a favourite subject with Italian painters. The Coronation of the Virgin is an attempt to give effect in painting to the Latin idea that Mary is the Queen of heaven. The title of Mary as Regina cœli was already well established in Italian theology, and it began to be introduced by poets and painters into their compositions.

The figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary are larger than life. They are both dressed in golden robes of glory, and the Virgin is seated on the right hand of Christ as if to appropriate to herself the verse of the Psalm already quoted. She does not stand however in literal fulfilment of the words of that Psalm; she is seated together with Christ on a magnificent throne or sofa with cushions all of gold while He places a golden crown upon her head. Around them is a sky of deep blue spangled with stars of gold. The effect of the whole is very rich. On one side or the other stand Saints Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist, and two other Saints of more recent creation, Francis of Assisi and Antony of Padua, while Pope Nicholas IV.

and Cardinal Colonna, very small in size, kneel before the throne.

A picture of the Coronation of the Virgin was then supposed to be the greatest honour which the art of the painter could offer to the Virgin. But it does not appear whether her soul received the crown, or whether she was crowned after the assumption of her body, and perhaps the point was not decided.

Below the Coronation of the Virgin is the series illustrating the life of Mary.

The Annunciation is the first subject. Gabriel stands with extended wings as if he had just alighted upon earth, and he points upwards to the heavens. In this picture we miss the old familiar act of benediction, though the action of Gabriel may be supposed to accompany the words *THE POWER OF THE HIGHEST SHALL OVERSHADOW THEE*. The Virgin also stands, and behind her is the high chair from which she has just risen in her agitation. But she is not found in any occupation; the distaff and spindle were a Greek tradition; they have disappeared and they will never be seen again. The dress of the Virgin is the conventional dress, a hood and mantle of rich blue and a robe of crimson. In the sky above are seen the head and shoulders of the Eternal, and the breath of God comes down in a visible stream upon the Virgin. The artist undoubtedly made a conscientious attempt to express in painting the very language of Scripture, although the treatment of the subject can hardly be judged to be an improvement upon that which may be seen in Palermo.

The Nativity shows the Virgin reclining on a couch and leaning over the newly-born Child, who is laid in a manger. The traditional ox and ass are standing near. In the sky above the Child is the star, which owes its brightness to a stream of light which passes to it from Him. A choir of Angels is seen in the heavens; Joseph reposes in a corner, and the Shepherds are entering. This treatment is a simple continuation of the ancient tradition.

The Presentation in the Temple is the meeting of the Virgin and Child with Simeon and Anna. Joseph carries the turtle-doves. This subject needs but little remark, for it has never varied much in art-treatment. Indeed it affords so little room for abuse and perversion, that Italian painters not being able to corrupt it have in latter times neglected it.

In the Adoration of the Magi, the three strangers from the East kneel one behind another and worship the Child, who is seated on the lap of His Mother. The star is over the Child, and light proceeds to it from Him as in the Nativity. An Angel hovers above. This subject does not admit of much variety of treatment.

The fifth or grandest subject, which occupies the middle place, is the Death or Sleep of the Virgin. This subject is treated in strict accordance with Greek tradition. It is the Dormition of Mary. She is laid upon a couch, and the hour of her departure has arrived. At each end of the couch the Apostles are assembled in two groups. A rainbow of brilliant colours stretches itself from side to side, and forms an

arch over the death-bed of the Virgin. Behind the couch and within the rainbow Christ stands, and He holds in His arms the soul of Mary which has just quitted the body in the form of a little child. This picture, though it has not scriptural authority, teaches nothing except the blessed end of her, who is not only called, but actually is, blessed. The soul of Mary is received into the arms of Christ, an end worthy of her who said *MY SOUL DOTH MAGNIFY THE LORD*.

The Virgin in every scene is dressed in the conventional blue and crimson. Christ, Mary, and the soul of Mary have the aureole as usual, that of Christ being cruciform.

The series is a beautiful example of the art of those days. The religious sentiment, the forms and colours, and the treatment in general, are a faithful reproduction of the traditions of Constantinople. And it must be added that these works show a delicacy of touch which belongs peculiarly to the growing excellence of the Tuscan school. Art and doctrine seem to be fairly satisfied in these works of Jacopo da Turrita, if we except only the unscriptural novelty of the Coronation of the Virgin.

A series of mosaics in the Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere is so like that of Santa Maria Maggiore, that to describe it would be to repeat what has been already said.

The name of Giotto is more famous than that of any of the founders and early masters of the Tuscan school. In his time art made great progress, but corruption of doctrine made progress also.

The Madonna was a frequent subject with the Tuscan artists, as she had been with their Greek masters. The Virgin and Child were sometimes represented alone, sometimes with Saints and Angels, subjects which carried with them no superstition necessarily, and might have been contemplated with pleasure and advantage.

And next to the Madonna and Child the Annunciation was perhaps the most favourite subject. One of the earliest pictures of Giotto is said to have been an Annunciation, which has perished.

It is impossible to do more than to notice a few of those pictures, which seem to show most strikingly the direction which sacred art was taking.

In the gallery at Naples there is a copy of an Annunciation by Giotto, a charming little picture. Gabriel comes in flying with his arms folded across his breast. The attitude is exceedingly graceful, but the action is a gratuitous improvement upon Scripture, and an unscrupulous departure from the Greek tradition, which made Gabriel hold up his hand in the act of benediction. To paint the Archangel coming into the presence of the Virgin with his arms crossed was the first step that was taken in the corruption of this most beautiful and simple of subjects. The manner in which Gabriel approaches the Virgin gives no indication of the nature of the message with which he was charged. Instead of painting the messenger who was sent from heaven to execute with fidelity the office entrusted to him, the gifted Florentine has made Gabriel alter the part assigned

to him in Scripture, and put on that manner which seemed to the private judgment of the artist the most proper in which an Archangel could approach the Virgin.

The Virgin Mary, dressed in the usual crimson and blue, does not rise from her chair in a manner denoting agitation, but, as painted by Giotto, she remains calmly seated with a book before her. Here again is a departure from old tradition. Instead of being found occupied in the patriarchal employment of the distaff and spindle, the Virgin is caught at her religious meditations. There can be, of course, no great objection to this change, for it does not involve any alteration of doctrine, and the one occupation has no more authority from Scripture than the other. But the treatment introduced by Giotto has a savour of affectation and suggests suspicions of artifice. And since Scripture does not say that the Virgin was engaged like Zacharias in offering incense, it would seem better to suppose her engaged in the ordinary avocations of private life. Giotto appears to have been the first or one of the first who altered the beautiful subject of the Annunciation for the worse. Both the Virgin and the Archangel have the aureole, which indeed is never omitted.

In the gallery of the Uffizi in Florence a work of Giotto is preserved, in which the Virgin and Child are represented on a throne attended by John the Baptist and a Bishop who kneels on one knee. A company of Angels surround them, and two of the Angels present lilies growing in flower-pots. The

emblematical lily first comes into notice in the time of Giotto. It was not known in Greek art, it was an invention of the Italians. It does not seem certain in this case whether the complimentary lilies are offered to the Virgin or to the Child. The lily however quickly established itself in favour, and became traditional in the Italian schools; and, though it is here introduced by Giotto into the scene of the Virgin and Child on the throne, it connected itself in later times exclusively with the Annunciation.

In the same gallery a picture of the Annunciation may be seen which is the joint production of Simon of Siena and Lippus Memmi, marked with their names and dated 1333. Gabriel with expanded wings kneels before the Virgin. With a finger of his right hand he points upwards, and in his left hand he holds a branch of olive. Out of his mouth come the words, *AVE GRATIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM*. The Virgin Mary remains seated composedly on her chair. In her hand she holds a closed book with her thumb inserted in it, as if to mark the page which she was reading when she was interrupted. Above them is a company of Seraphs; the Dove descends, and a beam of light proceeds from it to the Virgin. A flower-pot with a lily growing in it stands on the ground between the Virgin and Gabriel.

By every departure from tradition it may be suspected with too much reason that a change of doctrine is signified. Mischief lurks under every novelty in the painter's design.

Instead of making the sign of benediction Gabriel

points upwards, a significant action certainly, and the only part of the picture which seems to have reference to his mission. The branch of olive which he holds in his hand is open to this objection, that it is rather a token of peace and reconciliation after displeasure. Such an emblem might have been a fit accompaniment to the words of the Angels at the Nativity when they sang of peace on earth, but it seems out of place at the Annunciation. The branch of olive however does not appear in this scene except on this occasion ; it was soon succeeded by the more insipid lily.

The words of the salutation proceed out of the mouth of Gabriel, but no word is pronounced with reference to the coming of the Saviour, which was the essential part of the message which Gabriel was commanded to convey.

But the worst change of all is in the posture of the Archangel. He, who stands in the presence of God, is made to kneel before the Virgin and to do an act of worship. He seems as if he had left the sky to do homage rather than to make an announcement. It seems as if it was of more importance that he should kneel to the Virgin than that he should speak of the Incarnation of the Son of God. This indeed is no trifling change ; it is a bold step in the progress of Virgin-worship.

Mary on her part sits unmoved, with a book in her hand, the food of her meditations. There is nothing in her manner which indicates perturbation, nor does it appear that there was the least cause for the words

FEAR NOT, which Gabriel addressed to her. She merely accepts the salutation of the Angel with calmness, as if it would be wrong to show either surprise at his visit or joy at the purport of his message.

In a triptych at Naples, dated 1336, the Virgin and Child on the throne occupy the largest or middle space. On the two sides or wings the Annunciation is represented. On the spectator's left Gabriel kneels, but he makes no other demonstration. On the corresponding side the Virgin Mary is seen at her devotions, kneeling at a desk with a book before her.

In this example we meet with that treatment of the Virgin which afterwards became traditional in the Italian schools. She does not stand nor sit. The chair disappears, and a desk or faldstool is introduced at which the Virgin kneels. The distance which separates Italian from Greek ideas on this subject has now become very wide; in this treatment we hardly recognise the Annunciation of St. Luke.

These examples show traces of the Greek tradition which had been introduced into Italy. But it is also clear that no long time passed before the Italians began to wrest facts from their natural shape, and to give them an expression in accordance with the growing corruptions of the age. Tuscan artists not only indicated by their works the gradual advance of error, but they helped in no small measure to promote and perpetuate error by the power of their graceful pencils.

In the time of Giotto, and after him, histories of the Saints were frequently painted in a series of pictures

on the walls of Churches. The life of the Virgin Mary was most frequently so painted, and some of these histories still exist, though some have perished. The scenes painted were taken from the legendary history of the Virgin. The Roman editor of Vasari's lives of the painters says with reference to the life of Mary painted by Laurati or Lorenzetti: "This story is read in the Protevangelium of St. James and in the Gospel of the nativity of Mary, where it is said that Joachim being a rich and powerful man offered magnificent sacrifices at the solemn Festivals. One day he was told that he was not permitted to offer them, since he, being a childless man, was accursed of God; on which account he was obliged to go out of the temple in shame and confusion. It is believed that these writings are the compositions of Ebionite heretics."

These histories of Mary are a feature of the times, and it is necessary to give an account of the movement which caused their frequent appearance in the paintings of this period.

The Conception was of all questions concerning the Virgin that which was at this time most agitated by the theologians of the West. The Conception of the Virgin had been a Festival of the Greek Church for three or four centuries, for it is mentioned in the Menologium of Basil. It has been shown that Joachim and Anna were represented in the mosaics of Palermo. Probably the idea there intended by the introduction of the parents of the Virgin was no more than this, that she was of the lineage of David,

and that she inherited from her father those rights by virtue of which Christ was called the Son of David. The Greek Church seems to have been content with this doctrine, which was not only permissible but useful and always to be remembered.

The Festival of the Conception, though not yet formally received into the Church of the West, had been struggling for admission favoured by an increasing belief in the supernatural character of the birth of Mary. Thomassin says that, according to some, this Festival began to be observed in consequence of a revelation made to an English Abbot, who, having been caught in a tempest, was divinely assured that he should escape with his life if he made a vow to celebrate the Feast of the Conception. This circumstance is supposed to have happened a little before the time of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury. "On croit en effet que ce fut en Angleterre que cette Fête commença, ayant été dans ses commencements fort soutenue par l'autorité de S. Anselme qui mourut en 1109."*

A legend somewhat similar, and perhaps in its origin the same, is said to have been the cause of the institution of the same Festival in France. According to that story a wicked priest, having been drowned in the Seine while he was crossing it in a boat, was tormented after death, and was liberated and restored to life on condition that he would celebrate the Feast of the Conception. Reference was made to this story by St. Bernard when he blamed the

* Thomassin, *Traité des Fêtes de l'Eglise*, Livre II., Ch. 5.

Canons of Lyon for their unauthorised celebration of the Feast.*

The Festival gained ground in the Western Church but slowly, and not without opposition. It was discreetly called the Festival of the Conception, not of the Immaculate Conception, though undoubtedly there was a growing desire to press forward the doctrine of the supernatural birth of Mary.

The Festival was accepted in England, but not as one of necessary observance. The Council of Oxford, held in 1222, determined that all the Festivals of the Virgin should be strictly kept except that of the Conception, "*præter Festum Conceptionis, cujus celebrationi non imponitur necessitas.*"

The birth of Mary was connected more and more with miraculous agency. According to Matthew Paris, who is quoted by Thomassin, the Patriarch of Armenia travelled in England in the year 1228; and while he was at St. Alban's, he was asked by one of the monks whether the Feast of the Conception was kept in his country. The Patriarch replied that the Conception was not only honoured with a Feast, but it was believed to have been miraculous; "*quia, Angelo nuntiante Joachim dolenti et inhabitanti tunc desertum, ipsa Conceptio facta est.*" This story is very different from that which is related in the *Menologium* of Basil.

The Festival of the Conception was at length ordered by the Council of Bâle to be observed throughout the Western Church.

* See the Sermon of Bishop Wilberforce on the Annunciation.

Artists in Italy were willing to promote the growing errors by painting them. Giotto and others showed in painting how Joachim was driven out of the temple and accosted by the Angel in the wilderness. The Immaculate Conception had not yet come to its full growth; and, when that time arrived, the parents of Mary, or at least Joachim, vanished from the list of sacred subjects. But in the days of Giotto Joachim still took a principal part in the legendary history of Mary, and he was made useful in supporting the idea of the miraculous birth of Mary.

Angelo Gaddi painted a large Annunciation which is now in the Uffizi. Gabriel worships on one knee with wings closed. This act of adoration had become almost indispensable. Yet in accordance with the old tradition Gabriel makes the sign of the benediction while he says *AVE GRATIA PLENA*.

The Virgin Mary stands before the tall chair on which she has been sitting, and she holds in her hand the Bible open at the words *ECCE VIRGO CONCIPIET*. She wears the purple or blue mantle with a golden star on her shoulder, but she has no covering on her head. This is a departure from the rigorous law of dress which prevailed in the Greek school, though the uncovered head may not seem unsuited to the youthful Virgin. Both have the aureole.

In an opening in the heavens the Word of God is seen invested by an anachronism with human form, and as He looks down to see the message delivered by Gabriel He makes the sign of benediction. The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a Dove.

In this picture Gabriel kneels and blesses at the same time, and makes a compromise, in which an old tradition of the Greeks and a new invention of the Italians are blended together. The Virgin rises from her chair as of old, but she is caught in the study of the Prophet Isaiah. Indeed it is more from the words written in the Prophet than from those which issue from the mouth of Gabriel that the object of the Angel's visit is understood.

A small Nativity or Adoration of the Shepherds by Angelo Gaddi, which is in the Uffizi in Florence, is very similar in treatment to the Nativity of the Byzantine mosaics. The Virgin holds the Child wrapped in swaddling-clothes. The ox and the ass are under the shed together with the Virgin and Child, and they represent the idea of the manger. Joseph sits in a corner by himself. Two Shepherds with sheep around them kneel before Christ, and two Angels hover above. The scene is a landscape; for, since Scripture has left the point doubtful, the traditions of the open country and of the interior of a building have been judged equally admissible. On a hill in the distance a Shepherd is sitting on the ground, and an Angel is making the announcement of the Nativity to him. No star is seen in the sky, and no stream of light issues from Christ.

An Adoration of the Magi by the same painter is very like the picture which has just been described. The Virgin and Child are under a shed with the ox and the ass. Of the Magi or kings the foremost has placed his crown on the ground, and is kneeling

before Christ and kissing His foot. The other two stand behind, holding their gifts ready for presentation. The doctrine expressed in these two pictures is unimpeachable, the arrangement of the figures is unskilful.

Fra Angelico, though he lived till the middle of the fifteenth century, belongs to the older or Giottesque school of painting. An Adoration of the Magi painted by him may be seen in the gallery of the Uffizi. The Virgin and Child are on one side of the picture with dresses and aureoles as usual. The Virgin is seated on a common wooden stool, a mark of lowliness which contrasts well with the rich offerings which are made. The leader of the Magi having presented his gold bends humbly, and takes the foot of the Child in his hand. The second kneels on one knee and holds a vessel of myrrh or frankincense. The third is in discourse with Joseph, who is distinguished by the aureole. The Magi have rays of light proceeding from their heads. Persons of their retinue stand in attendance, and grooms hold their horses.

A small picture by Fra Angelico, also in Florence, represents the Death of the Virgin. The scene is a landscape or open country. The Virgin Mary is not laid upon a couch, but on a kind of bier furnished with poles, by which it may be carried. The bier is covered with a rich pall with crosses embroidered on it. The Virgin is placed on the pall, with her hands crossed on her chest. She is closely covered with hood and mantle of blue edged with gold lace. Im-

mediately behind the bier stands Christ, holding the soul of Mary in the form of a little child on His left arm, and with His right hand He blesses the corpse, and for a moment He seems to linger over it. This is a touch of pathos which we should have expected from the amiable genius of Fra Angelico. In the Greek mosaics of Palermo Christ turns round to bear away the soul of Mary, a grander idea than this of Fra Angelico, who paints Christ as stopping to contemplate the corpse of the departed. The Apostles stand round the bier as witnesses of the death of Mary, but they do not appear to be aware of the presence of Christ. Peter standing at the head of the bier reads a form of prayer from a book, and John at the feet of Mary holds a branch of palm. Two Angels, passionless and motionless, stand near Peter and hold censers, and two standing behind John hold tapers, while four large tapers on candlesticks burn at the four corners of the bier. All have the aureole, that of Christ having the Cross traced in it, and those of the Apostles having the name of each inscribed. The treatment is nearly the same as in the Martorana, but in this picture the subject seems to be the funeral as well as the death of the Virgin, and a little of the ritual of the Church is introduced.

A Death of the Virgin, a curious example of the ideas which could be taught in painting concerning the state of the Virgin after death, may be seen in the collection of old paintings in the Vatican. The picture, which is very small, is divided into twelve compartments, each division containing a subject

taken from the life of Christ or the Virgin. The last of the series represents the Death of the Virgin. The Apostles stand round her; and the treatment of the subject is the same as usual except that Christ does not stand by the couch to receive the soul of Mary. Christ is seen above; He is standing ready with a piece of white cloth held out at full length in His hands; He has come provided with means of carrying away the lifeless remains of the Virgin.

It is only by a comparison of this with other paintings that it is easy to arrive at a clear understanding of the meaning of the painter. In the old paintings on the walls of the Church of St. Laurence in Rome examples of the same mode of conveying the dead may be seen several times repeated. The body of St. Laurence, for instance, is carried to its burial by two of his friends, who hold each of them an end of the sheet on which the remains of the Saint are placed. And we may suppose that in the middle ages this was the usual manner in which the remains of the departed were committed to their graves. The Virgin Mary and St. Laurence are carried to burial in the same manner; only, while the Saint is carried by his friends, the Virgin is carried to her unknown tomb by Christ Himself.

This treatment of the Death of the Virgin is anything but refined and poetical. Indeed there is something exceedingly ghastly in these undisguised and business-like preparations for a funeral, in which Christ takes the principal share of the duty. In other pictures of the Sleep of the Virgin, Christ comes to

carry away the soul of Mary, here He comes to bury her body. The idea here expressed is, however, as remote as possible from the modern idea of the Assumption of the Virgin; there is no attempt made here to show the living Virgin floating gracefully in the air and ascending triumphantly to heaven amidst a glory of Angels, while Apostles and Saints look up with admiration. In this quaint picture, which is rather shocking in its sincerity, we have the idea brought before us that Christ came literally with a coffin to remove the body of the Virgin. The picture is Eastern and has Oriental characters upon it. It may be the work of the thirteenth or fourteenth century; and it is of bad art although the colours are fresh and clear.

Another small picture in the Vatican refers to the same subject. It is of Italian art. It illustrates the same idea that the remains of Mary were deposited in an unknown place, but the treatment is far more pleasing. Six Angels are seen carrying the body of the Virgin away from the tomb in which she had been laid, while she is passive and insensible in their hands. The Virgin is clothed in white, and the whole group is gracefully drawn. No Apostles are present; no human being is witness to the removal of the remains of the Virgin. It is not known to what place the Angels are conveying her. This idea, though it is an addition to Scripture, harmonises with what was taught by the Greek Church concerning the Sleep of the Virgin. It was a total change of idea to pass from the removal of the body

to the reanimation of it and the exaltation of it to heaven.

The Coronation of the Virgin has been painted in every age of Italian art since the revival of painting. In a picture by Fra Angelico in the convent of St. Mark in Florence Christ crowns the Virgin with a crown of gold. They have the aureole as usual, and they are painted in white robes of glory on a ground of white.

In the collection of old pictures in the Vatican there is a nice little Coronation, in which Christ is dressed in His usual colours, and the Virgin, for the sake of diversity of colour, wears a robe figured with flowers.

Indeed in every gallery of paintings in Italy Coronations of the Virgin of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are sure to be found.

The Coronation of the Virgin does not appear to have been in the first instance intended as a doctrine in a literal sense, but only as a kind of poetical justice, according to which the Virgin is supposed to receive her recompense after her departure out of this world. The idea of the Coronation of the Virgin was probably the result of a growing desire to exalt the Virgin and to place her on a level with Christ. The title of Queen of heaven had already been attributed to her, and the painter attempted to give substance to the title. It gratified the people to think that the soul of Mary, and perhaps her body also, had been raised to heaven and there rewarded with a crown. The idea was favourably received, and poets and painters

had free liberty to exercise their powers of imagination in setting forth the glory of the Queen of heaven.

When the idea of the Coronation of Mary first arose, it was not believed that she was the woman who is described in the Book of Revelation as being crowned with twelve stars. That was a later idea, an improvement. It must have been later in its origin than the third crusade; at any rate it had not penetrated as far as South Italy at that time. While King Richard of England was at Messina on his way to Palestine, he sent for Joachim, an abbot of Calabria, who was reported to be a man of great learning and was believed to have the gift of prophecy. Richard listened to the abbot's interpretation of the Apocalypse. Joachim explained to him that the woman clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars was the Church; the dragon was the devil; the seven heads were the seven principal persecutors of the Church, Herod, Nero, Constantius, Mahomet, Melsemut, Saladin, and Antichrist. He promised Richard the victory over Saladin, and said that Antichrist was already born in Rome.*

This interpretation was afterwards abandoned, and the woman in Revelation was believed to be the Virgin Mary. And then poets and painters gave her sometimes a golden crown and sometimes the circle of stars.

Dante, who was contemporary with Giotto, sees the Virgin exalted above Paradise, and rehearses the

* Fleury, Livre LXXIV., section 27, with a reference to Roger Hoveden.

hymn which was sung by St. Bernard to the Queen of heaven :

Ancor ti prego, Regina, che puoi
Ciò che tu vuoi.*

Dante styles the Virgin Queen of heaven. And perhaps the right way to paint the Queen of heaven was to paint her crowned with gold. Petrarc, who lived half a century later than Dante, speaks distinctly of the Virgin as the woman clothed with the sun and crowned with stars. In his hymn to the Virgin he says :

Vergine bella, che, di sol vestita,
Coronata di stelle, al Sommo Sole
Piacesti sì che in te sua luce ascose,
Amor mi spinge a dir di te parole.

And this poetry was written precisely at the time when the painters of Tuscany were painting the Coronation of the Virgin for every Church.

The doctrine of the Assumption had now become a doctrine of the highest rank, and the Sleep of the Virgin was no longer sufficient to satisfy the demands of the time. It seems as if the Assumption, as painted in the crypt of St. Clement's, had never been quite forgotten by Italian artists. It reappeared as one of the scenes in the life of the Virgin, and it was painted occasionally, but on a small scale, by old masters.

The Coronation of the Virgin might be considered as poetry transferred to canvass. But the Assumption

* Dante, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII.

began to be treated as a matter of fact and not as a mere offspring of the imagination.

It seems however that the Assumption wanted proof. To make it a reality it was necessary to connect it with facts and to give it a substantial basis to rest on. The multitude craved for signs. And, when evidence was wanted to establish the truth of the Assumption, relics, the robe and the girdle, were used for the purpose. These spurious relics had been kept at Constantinople, and they were believed to have proved their genuineness by the miraculous cures which they had wrought. This belief had satisfied the Greeks; and there was not a word said by them of the Virgin dropping her robe to St. Philip and her girdle to St. Thomas. But when the girdle by some unexplained means appeared in Prato, a small town in Tuscany, the Italians improved the legend connected with it. The people of Prato, the fortunate possessors of the relic, saw that it could be turned to advantage as an honour to the town and as a support to the doctrine of the Assumption. They told the world that they were the possessors of the girdle which the Virgin let fall into the hands of Thomas as a sure proof that she had been carried up to heaven alive. Even Thomas was forced to believe when he held the girdle in his hand, and the truth of the Assumption could not be doubted by Italians, when the relic was shown in Prato as a pledge to prove it.

The scene of the Virgin giving her girdle to Thomas began to be painted, especially in Prato and the

neighbouring places. At length the Assumption was fully believed, and the scaffold which had served to build it up was no longer required.

The times of the Councils of Constance and Bâle saw works of Christian art as they had been produced according to the improved ideas of Giotto and his successors. Florence was the place where art had been principally cultivated. Rome had been abandoned by the Popes for full seventy years, and it became a dreary solitude. And when the Pope returned to Rome a rival Pope mounted the throne at Avignon. It could not be expected that much could be done by the Popes for the fine arts during this period of disorder. Yet during the same period the cities of Northern Italy, especially those of Tuscany, were prosperous and wealthy. The citizens of Florence, enriched by trade, were ambitious of adorning their newly built Churches and palaces with the finest works which art could produce. Popular inclination more than the authority of the Church guided the minds of painters in the choice and treatment of sacred subjects. The woolworkers of Florence were the great patrons of the fine arts in the days of Giotto.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRILLIANT PERIOD OF ART IN ITALY.

AT the time of the Councils of Constance and Bâle Greek art had taught all that it could, and had ceased to have authority in Italy. Constantinople was on the eve of its fall. The future fortunes of sacred art were entirely in the hands of the Italians.

The school of Giotto too had passed away. A new school of painters, who improved greatly upon the principles transmitted to them, was rising in Florence. Art began to be scientific. Brunelleschi, who contests with Columbus the credit of the egg-problem, had ascertained the laws of perspective. Masaccio, whose love of nature exceeded his regard to his personal appearance, studied the laws of light and shade. Increased facilities were also given to the painter soon after this time by the improvement of the materials with which he worked. The method of painting in oil was introduced into Italy about the middle of the fifteenth century.

A new style of architecture was also coming into fashion. New Churches were built, and old Churches

were rebuilt, in the style of the Renaissance. These Churches being larger and better lighted afforded a better field to the painter.

A great future was before Italian art. But, as artists improved in the dexterous management of the brush, they departed farther from primitive art and taught error.

Little of the work of Masaccio remains to show how he painted the Virgin. There is an Annunciation in the Church of St. Clement in Rome, done by him in fresco and now much faded. The dresses are the same as usual. Gabriel kneels and presents the lily, while the Virgin also kneels at her devotions with a book before her.

A good picture of the Annunciation by Fra Filippo Lippi is in the Doria gallery in Rome. The Virgin, dressed in crimson and blue and hooded, is engaged in her devotions at a desk; Gabriel bends the knee and presents the lily; the hands of God are seen above and a ray of light comes down from heaven.

A Madonna and Child attended by an Angel, painted by the same artist, is kept in the Uffizi in Florence. The Virgin Mary has a ring of light encircling her head but not touching it, and the Child has a similar ring or circle with the Cross traced in it. The ring of light began about this time to take the place of the aureole. The ministering Angel, who has no such ring, is more youthful than those who were painted by the Greeks. The attitudes of all are easy and natural.

The Adoration of the Magi, a pleasing and in-

structive subject as long as it was painted with a single purpose, began to be painted more frequently when princely houses became more numerous in Italy. The connexion between the Adoration of the Magi and princely families is a curious illustration of the influences which governed sacred art in Italy. It is said that in a picture of this subject, which hangs in the Church of the castle at Naples, King Alfonso and his son Ferdinand are painted sustaining the part of the strangers from the East. The Adoration of the Magi was the only scriptural subject in which kings could take a part. It was considered as a compliment to them to paint them as kings doing homage to the King of kings, and they were well pleased to see themselves presented to the eyes of their people in a position which denoted at the same time their piety and their royalty. They who know the gallery at Munich may remember that in a picture of this kind one of the kings is said to be a portrait of Charles the Bold of Burgundy.

Sandro Botticelli has a picture of good size in the Uffizi in Florence representing the Virgin and Child attended by Angels. Nothing can be more fanciful than the ideas of the artist as shown in this picture. The Virgin is seated on a chair with the Child on her lap. She wears the usual mantle, and a light head-dress but not a hood, and a shawl tied loosely round her neck. She has neither aureole nor ring of light, but rays of light proceeding from her head. The Child has but little drapery, and He also has rays of light issuing from His head. The ministering Angels,

who are all youthful, are made to do active service to the Virgin. Two of them standing one on each side of her hold a crown of many stars over her head. An Angel standing before her holds an inkstand, and another holds a book in which she is writing *MAGNIFICAT ANIMA MIA*, while another looks over the shoulders of these two. All the Angels have rays of light proceeding from their heads, and all the figures are drawn in graceful attitudes. It is curious to note the difference between this picture and those of older time, in which the Virgin and Child were seated on a stately throne attended by Angels solemnly standing by them. If Greek art owed some of its rigidity to the stateliness of the imperial court, Italian art certainly owed much of its flippancy and impertinence to the bad government of the country and the insubordination of the people.

Painters began to trifle. The maternal affection of the Virgin and the tender infancy of the Child needed no artificial ornament to make them interesting. But, as if the object of sacred art had been to amuse and not to instruct, painters departed from simplicity and followed their own conceits. They were not able to improve the subject of the Madonna and Child by their variations, but they could easily degrade it with familiar and irreverent handling. Thus in a picture by the brothers Donzelli at Naples the Virgin is daintily dressed in blue mantle and hood and vesture of gold, while the Child is painted without clothing. But the artists could not be content with their picture unless they painted the Child

with two cherries astride across His finger. In another picture in the same gallery the Virgin allows a tame swallow to peck at her finger for the amusement of the Child; and in another the Child holds a captive goldfinch tied by the leg with a string, a most displeasing idea, and the very reverse of all that was natural to Him. Pictures of a later period exhibiting worse taste could be found, if it had been any pleasure to seek for them; it must be sufficient to name these few instances of a reprehensible practice.

But many nice pictures were painted with good feeling. Ghirlandaio has an Adoration of the Magi in the Uffizi at Florence. His figures are not placed, as in older pictures, all in a line and at an equal distance from the spectator. His knowledge of perspective enabled him to give depth to his composition, and to group his figures in an easy and natural form, so that one appears more distant from the spectator than another, and a space seems to be left between them through which a person might walk. This change added much to the beauty of the composition. The Virgin in the picture of Ghirlandaio is distinguished by the aureole, but the Child has a ring of light encircling His head. This change had also become necessary in consequence of the new mode of grouping. As long as the figures were spread out in a straight line, each might have its aureole without concealing any part of another figure; but when the group was drawn with figures two or three deep, the solid aureole would have con-

cealed too much of the picture. The ring of light therefore began to be the attribute of Saints, for it covered very little space and did not much interfere with the composition of the artist.

About the same time groups consisting of the Holy Family began to be painted. Anciently each member of the family was painted as a separate portrait. But, when painters had learnt the art of placing several figures together in one group, then the members of the family could be collected together and painted on one piece of canvass.

Ghirlandaio has a picture of this kind in the gallery at Naples. The Virgin Mary is there represented in the usual way, but instead of the hood she has a small head-dress of white lace. In another picture by the same master the Virgin's head is covered with a veil, and in a picture near it by Sandro Botticelli the Virgin wears a veil on her head with robe of crimson and mantle of blue according to the tradition.

Such an attire, though it was a departure from the monastic idea, was not displeasing. The white veil covered the top of the head and fell gracefully down behind; or, if a kerchief was used, it was twisted in the hair and tied in a knot.

To say the truth, no one, accustomed to modern fashion, would say that there was much to blame in this attire on the score of delicacy, so far as it appears in the works of Ghirlandaio and his contemporaries. The hood was disused, but the veil was not unbecoming. Yet Savonarola saw in this change of tradition the beginning of evil. He knew, of course, the faults

of the times, he saw a growing laxity, and he launched out from the pulpit in vehement terms against the levity and indelicacy of the age. He complained that the Virgin was no longer painted in humble modest guise, but with a boldness of manner and of dress. The fashion of the head-dress especially moved him to anger. Instead of the hood, which concealed all but the face, a fashion was invented which left the neck uncovered. If Savonarola could have seen specimens of later art, he would have had much more reason to blame the artists. However he saw the fault in time, and the experience of later ages has fully justified his timely censure.

There were many artists among the hearers of Savonarola on these occasions. As he was preaching one day with his usual vehemence against the evil influence of painters, first one and then a second were seen to retire from the congregation. They both went home, and, having washed the profane colour out of their brushes, they made a vow to devote themselves for the future to sacred art of the most severe kind. They were Lorenzo di Credi and Baccio della Porta, then a young man of twenty, afterwards better known as Fra Bartolommeo, and their works show that they conscientiously performed their vow.

There is in the Uffizi at Florence a picture by Lorenzo di Credi of the Virgin worshipping the Child. This was an idea new in art; and if it was not due to the imagination of Lorenzo himself, it certainly began in his time. The Child, smiling in the simplicity of infancy, has been carefully laid on the ground

with a white cloth under Him and a cushion under His head. The Virgin is on her knees by His side with her hands raised and placed flat together. The veil has fallen from her head and rests in ample folds around her neck. An Angel kneels on one knee, and bending over the Infant holds a chaplet above Him. All have the ring of light.

There is something wonderfully beautiful in the sentiment expressed in this picture. The attitude of the Virgin betokens maternal tenderness mingled with reverential awe. It seems as if she felt that it was the sole end of her own existence to be the mother and the nurse of the divine Child. She causes us to look away from herself to the Infant. There is no caressing, no fondling, but affection mixed with the most profound veneration.

Another picture by the same artist shows the Virgin adoring the Child in the same manner. She kneels as before with her hands placed flat together, while she looks at Him with a tenderness mingled with awe. She has a white hood, in other respects her dress is the same as usual. The Child lies on the ground with a cloth and a cushion under Him. The child John the Baptist leans over Christ, supported by an Angel. Joseph reclines near. All have the circle of light which had taken the place of the aureole.

An Annunciation by Lorenzo di Credi deserves to be mentioned. It is a sweet composition, with the merits of the painter and the faults of the age. Gabriel stands or rather stoops in a respectful attitude with wings nearly closed. He offers no lily and he

makes no sign of benediction, but he folds his arms across his breast. The Virgin stands and raises her hand in astonishment. She has drapery for a head-dress, a kind of veil which falls down on each side of her face. On one side of the picture is her couch, and near it there is a desk with a book on it, which sufficiently indicates her habit, though she does not seem to have been engaged in her devotions at that moment.

A picture of the same subject by Filippino Lippi may be seen at Naples. The Angel kneels on one knee and offers the emblematical lily as usual. The Virgin, with robes of red and blue and a veil of white lace, stands and has no book near her. But, to mar the picture by an absurdity, John the Baptist on one side and St. Andrew on the other are present at the Annunciation. This confusion of ideas is a sure sign that the artist painted for more purposes than one.

The Annunciation was now painted in handsome pictures four or five feet high. But, though so pleasing a subject, so full of instruction, so picturesque and dramatic in itself without the aid of any corrupt addition, it was habitually made by Italians the vehicle of erroneous doctrine, the convenient means of promoting Virgin-worship. From the first the Italian schools had shown signs of wavering. But, when art approached its most brilliant period, the Virgin was invariably painted as an object to be worshipped even by an Archangel. And to make the insipid offering of the white lily became an almost indispensable part of the duty of the heavenly messenger.

In the pictures of a more skilful but more corrupt age there is no sort of reference to the purpose of Gabriel's mission. It would seem as if he had been sent to say AVE MARIA and nothing else, so entirely suppressed is every allusion to the birth of Christ. The title of the Annunciation no longer corresponds with the work of the painter. Another title ought to have been invented for the unscriptural picture; Angelic salutation would not have been a term strong enough, Angelic genuflection ought to have been the name. Painters by their own pure invention perverted one of the most simple and beautiful of sacred subjects into an example of gross Virgin-worship. And, lest the repeated mention of this perversion should be tiresome, it must be stated once for all that the frequency with which this subject appeared, and the sameness with which it was treated, must be taken into consideration by all who would form a just estimate of the purity and utility of the painter's art in Italy.

The Presentation of Christ rarely appeared in more modern art because it afforded no room for corrupt handling. The same may be said of the Visitation of the Virgin, although it was the occasion out of which the Magnificat arose. The Adoration of the Shepherds appeared but seldom, because painters gained little by honouring pastoral life. But the Wise Men's offering was a favourite subject from the first as an illustration of the Epiphany, and it kept its place in the most brilliant period of art, and the ancient traditions in the treatment of it were well

preserved. Three Magi, or kings as they are supposed to have been, present their oblations to the Child, who appears to be eighteen or twenty months old, and is seated on His mother's lap. Happily this subject could not from its nature be easily perverted to the purposes of erroneous doctrine. The young Child receives the homage of the strangers who come to worship Him. The subject however afforded to painters, as it has been already said, an opportunity of flattering their great patrons with those compliments which painters knew how to pay. Italian artists as a rule painted with second ends, and in many a picture there was a design well understood by the public.

Lorenzo the Magnificent and others of the family of the Medici are said to have sat many times for their portraits in the scene of the Epiphany, being gratified to be recognised by the Florentines as persons worthy to be ranked with kings.

The subject was more frequently painted for the sake of placing ambitious petty princes before the throne of divine favour than for the sake of teaching a great Christian doctrine. If the Adoration of the Magi could not be used for the promotion of Virgin-worship, it was made to serve another purpose, and was used as the base means of flattering human pride and vanity. It no longer denoted the comprehensive call of the Gentiles; it was painted in honour of a few Italians well known in the streets of Florence, Mantua, Milan, Ferrara, and Bologna. A more curious contradiction to the spirit of Scripture

could hardly be found, than this interpretation of Scripture by Italian painters. If anything could destroy the idea of the unrestricted calling of the Gentile world, and of the homage paid to Christ by the first representatives of the Gentile nations, it was the perverse limitation of the divine favour to a few Italian grandees. The honours of the star in the East were unscrupulously awarded to Italian petty princes, who unscrupulously accepted them.

Some of these princes are known to posterity, and they are not admired but ridiculed. Some are forgotten, and oblivion has saved them from the ridiculous position in which the unwholesome flattery of painters had placed them. That priests should have allowed such things to pass is not marvellous. Savonarola was the only one of them in Florence who was bold enough to speak the truth. But Italy had satirists then, and flattery should have been tempered with sarcasm. Aretino missed an opportunity, the man who said that language was made to conceal one's thoughts, unless indeed he acted too carefully on his own principle. Machiavelli too thoroughly understood human nature, and though he was not the best of moralists he saw and deplored the faults of Italy. It is unfortunate that no judicious friend was sincere enough to chastise both prince and painter.

A magnificent Adoration of the Magi by Cesare da Sesto, perhaps the largest picture of the subject, is to be seen in the gallery of Naples. The Child has rays of light proceeding from His head, the Virgin and

Joseph have rings of light. The hood of the Virgin partly covers her head and leaves nothing to blame. The eldest of the Magi, a venerable gentleman, kneels with arms folded across his breast, and engages the particular attention of the Child, a thing which does not seem to displease the Virgin. In all probability there was significance in this.

The Adoration of the Magi was not a subject which favoured the peculiar claims of Rome. No example of it can be found in any of the Churches in Rome, and the three or four examples, which are seen in private collections, have found their way there by accident. The explanation of the scarcity of such pictures in Rome is easy. The subject was not one in which Cardinals and Bishops could appear. It would not have been consistent with their dignity, and, what is more, it would not in any way have suited their interests, to be seen in the disguise of kings.

Nor can the Venetian school show any remarkable example of the Adoration of the Magi, for the republicans would not have tolerated the sight of a Venetian with a crown. Sovereign princes took the subject into their special protection, and to them the multiplication of such pictures was pleasant perfume. As long as Italy contained a large number of reigning families, the offering of the Wise Men was frequently painted for the sake of introducing the likenesses of princely persons. But when a great part of Northern Italy came into the hands of Charles V. and the Pope, there were few petty

princes left, and there was no longer the same motive for painting the Adoration of the Three Kings.

The beautiful subject of the Virgin and Child has continued ever since the Council of Ephesus to be considered as an appropriate ornament of Churches. And, although the execution of the work was immensely improved in the more advanced period of art, yet happily the ancient traditions were for the most part respected, and the picture, when it was painted with a single purpose and without eccentricity, suggested the same ideas as ever.

Some of the most interesting pictures of the Virgin and Child are those of Francia, of Perugino, and especially of Raphael. The pictures of these great masters, in which the relation subsisting between the Mother and the Child is the single idea represented, and the doctrine of the Incarnation the grand truth displayed, always leave a pleasing and profitable impression on the mind from the sweetness, delicacy, and religious feeling, with which the subject is treated.

Pictures of the Virgin and Child have generally been named from some slight peculiarity in them. The celebrated Madonna della Seggiola is in the Pitti palace, and the Madonna del Baldacchino is in the same gallery. Other pictures by Raphael, or copies of pictures by him, may be seen in many galleries; as, for example, the Madonna dei Candelabri, so called from two tall candlesticks, the Madonna del Velo, in which the Virgin lifts a white lace veil from off the Child, and the Madonna del Passeggio, where she is teaching Him to walk.

The Madonna della Seggiola, exquisite as it is, is not the Virgin of ancient tradition. There is green in her dress, and she seems altogether more like an Italian peasant than a member of a religious order. There is indeed no trace of the religious dress about her. The picture has a beauty of its own which stands in the stead of every conventional formality. At the same time it is more agreeable to lovers of sacred art to see the Virgin attired in the dress which takes her out of the common walks of life.

Of this class of pictures, and as exquisite as any of them, is the Madonna del Coniglio of Correggio. The treatment of the subject is beautiful, but there is a variation in the colouring, which perhaps was caused by the exigency of the case rather than by any wish to depart from conventional usage. The Virgin is seated on the ground in a shady landscape with boughs overhanging. She sits with her side turned to the spectator, and her face is seen in profile. She holds the Child on her lap, and she bends affectionately and gracefully over Him. The painter has introduced into the dark side of the picture a white rabbit feeding under a grassy bank. We know how hazardous it is to introduce a white spot into a picture; we know, for example, how effective the white dove is, and the white lily. But the painter has in this case given to the Virgin a dress of white under the blue mantle. This treatment makes her the most conspicuous object, and the intrusive little animal is reduced to his proper insignificance.

It is not pretended that in these pages a selection of paintings is made according to their merit. At the same time it frequently happens that the most celebrated paintings are also the best and most convenient examples of the traditions of art.

Trifling changes strike the eye of one who is accustomed to look for the traditional forms and colours. Such changes are not pleasing to the moral sentiment, and sometimes they are highly displeasing to the taste, as when Pontormo in a picture in the Borghese gallery painted the Virgin in crimson dress, yellow sleeves, and green mantle.

The only scenes, in which the Virgin and Child could according to Scripture be grouped with other persons, are the Nativity, the Epiphany, and the Presentation in the Temple, though the Holy Family may also be classed with these as coming within the sense of Scripture. But the subject most frequently painted by Italian artists was the Virgin and Child with Saints. Pictures of this kind could be varied infinitely, according to the taste of the painter or the commands of the patron. In old times, when an artist had a certain space of wall to cover, he represented the Virgin and Child in the middle, supported on each side by Angels and Saints standing erect at equal distances from each other. The idea kept its ground, and served as a subject for painting long after, but the artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had learnt to arrange their figures in picturesque groups.

The plan was to place the Virgin "on the throne"

or "in glory," and to group the Saints or votaries around or beneath her.

The Madonna on the throne is the old Byzantine subject. The scene is on earth, and the picture represents the living Madonna with the Child in her arms.

The Madonna in glory is the Madonna holding the Child and seated among the clouds, a vision of the painter, an impossible state, an idea which made its appearance in art about the time of Raphael.

Of these pictures there are many hundreds, and many of them very large. Indeed, there is no subject so common in the whole range of sacred art. It was only needful to seat the Madonna on a large chair, or to raise her to the skies, and then any Saints could be grouped around or below. In choosing the Saints it was not necessary that the unities of time and place should be considered; Saints of different epochs could be brought together for the honour of the Church, or the monastery, or the town, for which the picture was painted.

In the Vatican there is a Madonna on the throne attended by four Saints, the work of Perugino; and there is one by the same artist in the Uffizi at Florence, in which St. John is introduced on one side and St. Sebastian on the other. These are both stiff groups in the old style. But the appearance of Sebastian in the latter picture is to be noticed as a sign of the times when Italians began to paint the nude. And Sebastians from this time became frequent.

Many such pictures were painted for the sake of introducing a living person, and the evil fruits of the example set long before by Paschal I. and George of Antioch began to abound. A celebrated picture of this kind is one by Mantegna. The Virgin and Child are on a throne amidst various Saints. Among these are St. Michael the Archangel and St. Maurice, who hold a mantle stretched over Francis Gonzaga. He kneels while the Virgin extends her hand towards him in token of protection. The princess also kneels by the side of her husband. In the background are seen the patrons of the city of Mantua, St. Andrew and St. Longinus. "It is truly wonderful," says Lanzi, "to behold carnations so delicate, coats of armour so glittering, draperies so finely varied, and ornamental fruits so fresh and dewy to the eye."

One of the grandest pictures of the Madonna in glory is the Madonna di Foligno of Raphael, a very large work, which shares a room in the Vatican with his Transfiguration and the Last Communion of St. Jerome by Domenichino. The Virgin and Child are seated among the clouds. Below them on earth are St. John the Baptist, St. Francis, St. Jerome, and Sigismondo Conti, who in the dress of a civil magistrate kneels while the others stand. The small town of Foligno is seen in the background, and an infant Angel in the foreground holds a tablet commemorative of the Virgin's favour to Foligno. Happy Foligno! Not every borough of ten thousand inhabitants has the Virgin for a protectress, and a painter like Raphael to make the fact known to the

world. Whatever the merits of Sigismondo Conti may have been, he will be famous as long as the colours of Raphael shall last.

These are fine examples of a class of pictures that was very numerous. The groups easily take the pyramidal form, which is the delight of painters. The Virgin and Child in the clouds or on the throne form the apex, and the group of Saints makes a wide substantial base. No subject could afford better materials to the painter. Warriors in armour, ladies with ample folds of rich drapery, monks in their religious habits, bishops in copes, and eremites with bare limbs, could be brought together at the painter's pleasure. A living person who was fortunate enough to command the talents of a great painter could be placed upon the same canvass with all that was held most sacred and venerable in the public mind. The petty princes of Italy had their day precisely at the time when poets and painters lived to flatter them. No people of small merit have ever been so praised as the little rulers of Italy. But, when the small sovereignties were abolished, one reason for painting the Madonna in glory vanished also.

The selfishness of the idea which caused the Madonna to be so frequently painted is worthy of notice. The Saints, princes, and senators, who were painted in company with her, were Italian, the painters were Italian, the people upon whose minds an impression was to be produced were Italian. It seems to have been the established belief that the Virgin favoured that race more than any other. The Italian

way of realising the Communion of Saints was to suppose them born within the Italian peninsula, and highly favoured by the Virgin. Even cities and market towns were ambitious of possessing the especial favour of the Madonna, and then the sentiment became provincial and municipal. Each town thought itself more beloved than its neighbours, and Virgin-worship was increased by Italian self-esteem.

It is well understood that, in the present state of religious and political feeling in Italy, it would be impossible to place noblemen and generals, mayors and senators, in company with Saints under the eyes of the Virgin. This would be a hazardous experiment to try upon princes in modern days, when dress is unpicturesque, and when the characters of men are discussed in prose. It would be a cruelty, for example, to the Inquisitors who condemned Galileo, and to Cardinal Giulio Alberoni, and to the last of the Doges, and to Ferdinando Vecchio of Naples and his consort Carolina, to expose them to taunts and jeers under this aspect. It would be dangerously provoking to paint the rich nephews of modern Popes meekly kneeling to receive blessings showered down plentifully upon them from above. Few would like to offer themselves as subjects for the experiment. The times changed and Virgin-worship took another turn. The Madonna ceased at last to be painted as the protectress of towns and families. The Virgin as the Immacolata was a later development. As the Immacolata the Virgin was painted alone,

and living persons could no longer be placed on the same canvass with her.

The old Italian subject of the Coronation of the Virgin continued to be painted during the best period of Italian art. In a few cases the crown is placed on the head of the Virgin by the Father Himself, in which case the Virgin kneels lowly and becomingly, and the act, if it is not scriptural, is at least very gracefully done. Sometimes the crown is brought by two Angels, who hold it between them over the Virgin's head, in which case she stands and frequently holds the Child. But most frequently she is crowned by Jesus Christ, who sits by her and shares the throne with her. The Coronation was easier than the Assumption, for the figures were in repose, with the exception of the slow and gentle motion necessary for the act of coronation.

Raphael among his early works painted a Coronation of the Virgin, which is now in the Vatican. Christ and the Virgin are seated above the clouds in clear blue sky. They sit on the same throne, and He crowns her with a crown of gold, while she sits still. The action cannot be called ungraceful, though certainly it is not strikingly beautiful. The artist was evidently cramped by the conditions imposed upon him as to the arrangement of the figures. The subject is not easy to paint well and gracefully when both the figures are on the same level; and the desire to place the Virgin on an equality with the Saviour threw this difficulty on painters.

The picture is divided into two equal parts hori-

zontally by the stratum of cloud, above which Christ and the Virgin are sitting. Below the cloud the Apostles are seen at the empty tomb, out of which the lily and other flowers are growing.

The Coronation of the Virgin did not of necessity imply the Assumption of the Virgin in the body. It might have been intended that her soul was crowned as a sign of the happiness which she enjoyed in paradise; and this was perhaps the idea which artists wished to convey in the older Coronations. But in the picture by Raphael the Assumption is certainly presupposed, for the Apostles are gathered round the empty tomb.

A change in the traditional colours is to be observed in this picture. While the dress of the Virgin follows the established rule, the colours of the dress of our Lord are changed. His mantle is crimson and His tunic is blue, so that the red in the dress of the one is brought into contact with the blue in the dress of the other, and monotony of colour is avoided. The Greeks had no need to make provision for this difficulty, for they never painted the subject. In pictures of the Virgin and Child, of the Crucifixion, and of the Pietà or Deposition, the difficulty does not occur, because Christ is then covered with white drapery. But in the Coronation, and in the Marriage at Cana, some change must be made: in the first case the colours must be altered, in the second the persons must be separated.

Another picture of the same subject, said to have been begun by Raphael and finished by Giulio Romano and Francesco Penni, is also in the Vatican. The

colours in this picture are similar to those used in the picture which has just been described. For the sake of showing the equality of Christ and the Virgin Mary the artists have placed them on the same level, and the act of coronation is ungracefully performed. Christ is made to stretch out His arm horizontally and crown the Virgin. They sit above the clouds, and on the earth below the Apostles stand round the empty tomb.

Pinturicchio has a Coronation of the Virgin in the same gallery. For the sake of diversity of colour Christ is dressed in a tunic of green under a crimson mantle. The colouring is pleasing, but Pinturicchio did not know that, according to the rule of the Byzantine court, green denoted the second order of dignity.

In this picture there is a difference in the attitudes, which are far more graceful than in the two pictures just mentioned. Christ alone sits, and holding the crown in His uplifted hands He proceeds to place it on the head of the Virgin, who kneels down before Him. The beauty of the composition is greatly increased, but this advantage is obtained by the sacrifice of some portion of the dignity of the Virgin.

There is both a natural and a moral beauty in an act of coronation solemnly performed. He who does the act must have the superiority of position. The crown must descend from above; it must be placed with steady hands upon the head for which it is designed. A crown coming sideways seems as if it was thrust, and this awkwardness is inevitable when the giver and the receiver of the crown are on the same level. In pictures of the Baptism of Christ by John,

the beauty of the composition depends upon the just position of the figures. The Baptist stands for once on higher ground, in the more commanding position; the water is poured from above; and the Lord Jesus Christ stoops in voluntary humiliation to receive Baptism from the hands of His forerunner. This is the natural position, and it is the most picturesque. The two persons are in their proper places, the Baptist in the execution of his office, the Messiah in the fulfilment of the law of obedience. The water is not thrown but poured, and it comes with no more force than that which belongs to it by nature. Precisely the same conditions are needed to make the Coronation of the Virgin a graceful picture. But the Italian artist was placed in an unfortunate dilemma. If the dignity of the Virgin must be maintained, then the composition must suffer in beauty; if the beauty of the composition must be studied, then the Virgin must stoop.

In the Coronation of Pinturicchio, Christ and the Virgin are in the heavens; on each side of them are Angels playing on musical instruments; around them is a circle of Angelic heads; and on the earth below there is a company of Saints of all periods.

The Assumption of the Virgin became a more frequent subject when the skill of painters was sufficiently advanced to enable them to represent the Virgin floating in air accompanied by Angels. It began to be painted too with figures as large as life, especially when it was intended to be the altar-piece of a Church built in the modern Italian style.

Raphael, who painted many pictures of the Virgin and Child and of the Holy Family, painted no Assumption.

There is an Assumption by Pinturicchio at Naples. It is not very large, and in accordance with an old fashion the Virgin is made to enter into heaven through a rent in the sky which gapes open to receive her. She is accompanied by Angels, and the Apostles gaze at her from below.

A picture of the Assumption by Fra Bartolommeo may be seen at Naples. This fine artist well remembered the lesson which he had learnt from Savonarola, and whoever looks at his pictures sees the works of a great painter and a good man. The Virgin is dressed in the old conventional colours. She is closely hooded and enveloped in ample garments, and around her head she has the aureole, which had now passed almost out of use. The figure of the Virgin is conscientiously painted in accordance with the most severe traditions of art, and it expresses good religious feeling. But, alas, the Virgin of Fra Bartolommeo never was made for flying ; she is fashioned after the graver type of earlier times, and she seems too heavily laden to rise in the air. She is more like the Virgin who was painted standing by the Cross of Jesus or weeping over His dead Body. She has not the sylphlike airiness and buoyancy which Guido and others at a later period gave to the ascending Virgin. It was a mistake to paint her in a position for which her appearance and character did not fit her. To make a delightful picture of the Assumption of the

Virgin it would have been necessary to change her costume, and to paint her less encumbered with dress and more free in her motions; it would have been necessary in short to disobey all the orders which Savonarola had given.

The good Fra Bartolommeo sacrificed his sense of the beautiful to his sense of duty, and he painted the Virgin in the Assumption as he would have painted her holding the Child. Angels accompany the Virgin; but, instead of the Apostles, St. John the Baptist and St. Barbara stand at the tomb. The picture was perhaps painted for a nunnery dedicated to St. Barbara.

Titian painted a very large Assumption, which is now the most famous picture in the gallery at Venice. The Virgin Mary, wearing the usual dress but without a hood, stands perfectly still upon a cloud. The idea of motion is expressed by the action of attending Cherubs, who with vigorous efforts push the cloud upwards. In this mode of raising the Virgin to heaven we see some traces of the old idea, according to which the Virgin Mary was borne away by Angels to an unknown place. The Apostles are in a group below. Above all is the Eternal, who holds a crown in His hand ready for the Virgin.

The legend of the girdle as connected with the Assumption had not quite ceased to be useful. It was painted in a picture now in the Lateran palace, in which the Virgin while ascending lets fall her girdle to Thomas. Granacci painted a similar work now in the Uffizi. The Virgin rises supported on a

cloud. She is hooded and dressed as usual and attended by Angels. Below is the tomb with flowers growing out of it. St. Thomas kneels by the tomb and receives into his hand one end of the girdle while the Virgin still holds the other. The Archangel Michael, partially clad in armour, kneels on one knee on the other side of the tomb with his drawn sword in his hand. All have the ring of light round their heads.

A picture of the Annunciation in the gallery at Naples, by Parmeggianino, proves that the subject till kept its ground, and shows also the state of Italian taste. Parmeggianino painted the well-known picture of Cupid preparing his bow, a picture so beautiful that it might pass for the work of Correggio his master. The beholder is so pleased with the happy idea and the skilful performance of the painter that he forgets Cupid's want of drapery; and Cupid seems to forget it himself, so intent is he upon his mischievous purpose. But in the Annunciation of Parmeggianino Gabriel inexcusably seems as if he had been intended for an anatomical study rather than for a heavenly messenger sent to carry tidings to the Virgin Mary. Parmeggianino had no feeling for sacred art; and we are obliged to say that, though he was an admirable painter of Cupids, he was a very bad painter of Archangels.

The period of Charles V. and Philip II., was a period of Church-building in Italy, facilitated by supplies of Spanish gold in those parts which were subject to the Spanish crown. The Churches then built

were so many opportunities for the display of the painter's skill and for the exhibition of the newest picture-doctrine. This was also the age of Palladio, who built the grand Churches which were to be adorned with the paintings of the Venetian masters. Some of the old Churches too were transformed from Gothic into bad Italian. Vasari tells us that he himself removed the mullions and enlarged the windows of a Church in Arezzo, that the paintings, which were to be executed in it, might be seen in a better light. On the walls and ceilings of the new Churches the Virgin Mary had her full share of honour. The Assumption found its proper place in the lofty cupola, where the artist had space to paint his ideas of the glories of heaven.

The mode of the Conception of Mary was left undetermined by the Council of Trent, and every one was allowed to hold his own opinions, though controversy on the subject was forbidden. But it appears that the restrictions which were imposed on theologians did not touch artists, who enjoyed free liberty to paint according to the best of their imaginations just as if the Immaculate Conception had been an article of belief.

Raphael and his great contemporaries never attempted to paint the Immaculate Conception. We learn the history of it as a subject for painting from the confessions of a painter who was an arch offender against the traditions of sacred art. Vasari in his history of his own life speaks of a treatment of the Immaculate Conception of which he claims the

credit. He painted a picture for the Church of the Holy Apostles in Florence, and he thus describes his composition. He painted a tree, a kind of genealogical tree, representing human nature with its corruptions. At its roots were Adam and Eve, and to its branches were fastened with the cords of sin Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Joshua, David, and the kings his successors, and others, all tied by both arms except Samuel and John the Baptist, who being sanctified from their birth were tied by one arm only. The old serpent, human from his waist upwards, was represented with his tail coiled round the trunk of the tree and with his hands bound behind his back. The glorious Virgin, tied by no cords, stood with one foot on the head of the serpent and with the other on the moon, as if in fulfilment of the words written in Genesis and Revelation. She was surrounded by a glory of many Angels, who were illuminated by rays which proceeded from her; and rays passing from her among the leaves of the tree gave light to those who were tied to the branches and were relieved by the grace of her from whom the light proceeded. Two Cherubs in the heaven above held between them a scroll on which these words were written, *Quos Evæ culpa damnavit Mariæ gratia solvit*.


There is much to observe in this quaint picture. The old genealogies of the Virgin Mary which connected her with the family of David are completely forgotten. Joachim and Anna, as her parents were called, do not appear; they have vanished from the

painter's list. It was time to be rid of them when the idea of the Immaculate Conception was well developed, and they are dismissed accordingly as being not only useless but troublesome. Mary is now represented as a person different in nature from the rest of the human species. We are taught in this picture to forget her forefathers, and to regard her as one who knew no family ties. Her history begins at a much earlier time than that of Joachim and Anna, for she was predestined from the moment of the fall of man to be the restorer of the human race and the destroyer of the serpent.

There is a wide gulf between this picture of Vasari and the old historical series of the life of Mary. Former paintings left the impression on the mind of the beholder that Mary was one of his own race; now she is one of a different species, standing upon different ground. She is no longer the handmaid of the Lord, Blessed among Women, the Mother of God made Man. She is the predestined instrument of God for the destruction of sin, she is the redemptress by whose grace mankind are loosed from their bonds. She is not only free from sin herself, but she has also the power of liberating from sin those who are bound by it. In former utterances of art the Virgin Mary had no more than a reflected glory, as being the Mother of Jesus Christ. As the Immacolata she stands alone in her own independent glory. Even her Divine Son has no honour in the Immaculate Conception; and, whenever the Immacolata is honoured, Christ must be kept away that the Virgin may appear

alone as the author of the promised salvation. It would be a relief to go back to the time-honoured legend, which, if apocryphal, at least was not heretical. It would be a satisfaction to see once more Joachim mourning over his childless state.

The picture of Vasari contains a mixture of the words of Genesis, "She shall bruise thy head," as the Romanists read them, with the words of Revelation, "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet." This is a bold interpretation of both places; and the first persons who forced them violently together were they who taught doctrine by pictures. The first contrivance was to represent the Virgin standing on the moon and crowned with stars. But the words of Revelation have no reference whatever to a birth free from sin. To strengthen the case the words of Genesis were pressed into the service; but even then there was nothing to prove exemption from original sin. Something was still wanting. Vasari was obliged to imagine the tree to which all except the Virgin were bound with the cords of sin, a clumsy contrivance and a pure invention of the painter. Vasari could not find in older works an example which satisfied him, and he was obliged to invent a new design to express a new idea. He speaks of his work with an honesty which would have been delightful if he had been confessing a fault. He is desirous of the honour of being acknowledged as the inventor of a new way of painting the immaculacy of the Virgin, which claim, if the invention was anything to boast of, was probably well founded. So pleased




was he with the idea that, according to his own statement, he painted another picture similar to the first, though a little varied. He also painted for a convent in Naples a picture which he describes as follows : St. John stands admiring our Lady, who is clothed with the sun, having her feet placed on the moon and her head crowned with stars. This is called by courtesy a picture of the Immaculate, though it is only a kind of Coronation of the Virgin, and has nothing to do with a birth exempt from sin. Vasari, who was not a painter of brilliant fancy or fine touch, did his full share in promoting the worship of the Virgin with his pencil, and he deserves to be mentioned as the boldest and most original of those who have employed the art of painting for the corruption of religion.

When the Caracci and their brilliant school had the lead in matters of art Assumptions were painted in great numbers. These were all grand pictures of large dimensions, twelve feet high, and containing figures as large as life. They were often painted as ornaments for the high altar. They are to be seen in the Churches for which they were painted, for few of them have ever been sold into public galleries or private houses. If, by dint of painting, the Assumption could be rendered familiar and acceptable to the public mind, the labours of painters must have had that effect, for the ascending Virgin was placed in great beauty and majesty before Italian eyes.

Such pictures may be seen in most of the Churches in Rome. There is an Assumption by Annibal Caracci in Santa Maria del Popolo, one by Passignano in

Sant' Andrea, one by Scipione Gaetano in San Silvestro. In these and in many more the treatment is nearly the same, the Virgin appears in her ancient traditional colours, Angels accompany her while Apostles gaze from below. There is little difference to be seen except that which arises from the style of the master. At this time the aureole and the ring of light had gone quite out of use.

Many pictures of the Virgin and Child in glory were painted by the Caracci and their scholars, and the conventional colours of red and blue continued to be used. But these colours, though very well suited to the old subjects, suggested the idea of too much weight for the Assumption. Besides, they put a difficulty in the way of rich colouring, because they compelled the artist to use cool and dull colours in the rest of the picture, so that the Virgin might always be the brightest object, and that the surrounding sky might be in harmony with the dress of the Virgin. But Guido was bold enough to change those colours of the Virgin, which had been found suitable for a scene on earth, though they did not so well accord with the glories of the sky. The Virgin gravely dressed according to the tradition of early times was not a good figure for the Assumption. So Guido thought, and he painted the Virgin Mary in a flowing skirt of white and a loose mantle or scarf of light blue, and then he threw as much warmth and brilliance as he chose into the sky. There was no danger from an overpowering richness of colour, when the Virgin was dressed in light and delicate



blue and white, and Guido could paint her floating in a heaven glowing with amber and crimson. The old style of dress was altered, that the glories into which the Virgin was received might be increased. And henceforth the Virgin appeared according to this treatment in the scene of the Assumption. In the other scenes of her history she continued to be painted with some resemblance to the ancient Byzantine type. But in the Assumption the rule was altered, and the Virgin attired in airy blue and white was seen rising gracefully through a sky of which the darkest shadows were glorious.

An Assumption by Guido forms part of the Bridgewater collection, and a duplicate picture or one very similar may be seen in the Louvre.

There is a small and spirited Assumption in the Colonna gallery in Rome by Rubens, who adopted the new treatment of the subject. And in the numerous wall-paintings which were executed in Churches after this time the same treatment as a rule was followed.

Annunciations continued to be painted as often as ever. The attitudes of the Virgin and the Archangel were always the same, and Gabriel never failed to present the sentimental white lily.

Guido painted an Annunciation, a large altar-piece for the Chapel in the Quirinal palace. It has figures as large as life, and it is the grandest picture of this subject. The Virgin Mary is in her usual costume, for Guido followed the old tradition in the Annunciation though he departed from it in the Assumption.

She is kneeling at a desk with a book before her, and she betrays no great signs of emotion. Gabriel with outspread wings kneels on one knee before the Virgin on the stratum of cloud on which he has descended, and he holds out the inevitable white lily, and it is needless to say that the action is gracefully done. He looks at the Virgin with radiant countenance and with head slightly leaning backwards, and no one knew how to put heads on shoulders better than Guido. There is a dash of chivalry in Gabriel's deportment, a mixture of gallantry and religion. The measured homage of one knee is offered as Raleigh would have offered it. All these things had been painted by artists oftentimes before, but Guido seems to have made the subject his own by the spirit which he infused into it. Gabriel's garments are not long enough to conceal his well-formed limbs, and, as painted by Guido, he is the worthy compeer of the Michael who overcomes the dragon, as painted by the same artist. The Dove is seen descending, but it seems to come merely to witness an act of Virgin-worship done by an Archangel.

The Death of the Virgin was no longer painted. It was more in accordance with the advanced state of opinion in Italy to think of the Virgin as of one who was free from sin and predestined to be the restorer of the human race, than as of one who had died the common death. The Mater Dolorosa was a frequent subject as connected with the Crucifixion and the Deposition of Christ. But that the Virgin should have had any natural sufferings apart from

the sacred sorrows which she shared with her Son was not to be believed.

The Death of the Virgin would have seemed to stand in contradiction to her Immaculate Conception. Death is connected with original sin; and if Mary was exempt from all infection of sin there seems to be no reason why she should die the death of Adam. So embarrassing an idea as the Death of Mary would seem to be derogatory to the immaculacy of Mary and to militate against it. The Death of Mary might have been necessary as a preparation to her Assumption. There was no inconsistency in showing her Death followed by her Assumption, for these two things are perfectly reconcileable. But the Death of the Virgin could not by any means be reconciled with her Immaculate Conception, and therefore as the latter idea gained ground the former idea was allowed to drop into oblivion. The Death of the Virgin was passed over by painters from a natural instinct. The Assumption, which presupposes the Death and the reanimation of the Virgin, ought in logical consistency to have gone at the same time. But by a manifest inconsistency the Assumption, which made a good picture, kept its ground and remained in favour.

The Immaculate Conception soon followed the rule of the Assumption and was painted with the same colours. A large picture of this subject by Bianchi has been copied in mosaic in St. Peter's in Rome. The Virgin Mary is clothed in raiment of white and light blue with a circle of stars round her head. By

an awkward contrivance she stands on the moon and at the same time she treads on the serpent which is crawling on the world. Around her are flying Angels, and two or three Franciscans worship her in the foreground.

The Immaculate Conception however took a simpler form: A portion of the world was shown, upon which the serpent was crawling. The Virgin Mary was represented as crushing the head of the serpent beneath her feet, and a company of Angels was painted flying round her in a richly coloured sky. There are several paintings in Rome of this kind. The act of Mary is supposed to prove her immaculacy.

Murillo, who frequently painted the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception, adopted the new mode of colouring in his pictures of the Virgin. There is an Assumption by him in the Dulwich gallery and an Immaculate Conception in the museum at Antwerp.

A Coronation of the Virgin in Rome by the Cavalier d'Arpino is an example of the subject as treated in his time. There is no difficulty as to colour, for Christ wears merely a little white drapery.

Carlo Maratta painted the Virgin so frequently that he was called Carlo delle Madonne. An Immaculate Conception by him may be seen in Rome. The Virgin stands on a rocky eminence; but the artist, who followed orthodox traditions, has painted her in the old colours. Moses and John are below. Moses looks away from the Virgin absorbed in thought,

while John looks at her in admiration. The two inspired writers are there as the authors of Genesis and Revelation.

Carlo Maratta painted the chief altar-piece in the Church of San Carlo in Rome. The subject of it is the Virgin introducing Carlo Borromeo to Christ. The Virgin Mary wears the usual colours, which she may easily do, since Christ in accordance with later usage is very scantily clothed with white drapery. The Saint, who kneels before Christ, is arrayed in a grand cope of scarlet. Carlo Borromeo is probably the last of the Italians who has been so represented; and perhaps he is the last Italian who could have borne to be so represented without the ridicule of his fellow-countrymen.

Italian art was now in a state of decline, and there is nothing more to be added to the history of Virgin-painting. Indeed by the end of the seventeenth century the work of the painter had been effectually done, and the public mind in Italy was already well prepared for the reception of the Immaculate Conception as a dogma of the Church.

CONCLUSION.

UPON the whole it may be affirmed that, notwithstanding the abuses of the painter's art, painting has been of advantage to religion. Sacred art had its beginning in early times, and equally with poetry, music, and architecture, it has been both useful and ornamental to the public services of the Christian congregation. Sacred art in its purest state taught by pictures the same doctrines which have been taught by the Festivals of the Church. And, so far as art has been consistent with itself and true to its purpose, it has done a real benefit to the Christian faith.

Improvement in sacred art came with experience. And, when the principles of sacred art were sufficiently settled, the right employment of the Christian painter was to produce such pictures as contained true doctrine, and to keep them before the eyes of the people for their edification.

Art may be abused in two ways. It is possible to make a wrong use of good and lawful pictures, and it is possible to teach false doctrine by means of pictures audaciously painted in defiance of the truth.

The first of these faults must be laid to the charge of the Greeks in some measure before the time of the Iconoclasts and still more afterwards. It cannot be said that the Church of Constantinople has ever allowed the true doctrine to be corrupted by the art of the painter. But the superstitious belief of the Greeks in pictures prized for their wonder-working power, or for their antiquity and their blackness, has caused them to look away from the true lessons which pictures taught, and to put their trust in board and paint. This was the fault of the worshipper, not of the painter. A good picture does not of necessity minister to superstition ; but the best of pictures may be made subservient to superstitious purposes, if the worshipper is so determined, though the same picture may contribute to the edification of him who views it thoughtfully as a mode of instruction. And such pictures, however much they may have been used amiss by the ignorant, may still be valuable in future times as examples of the genuine traditions of art. The Persian worships the sun, but the sun is not to blame on that account. The sun is not the less an instrument of good in the hands of the Father of lights. And the evil will cease as soon as the Persian shall cease to worship the creature, and shall learn from created things to give glory to the Creator.

But the other fault, that namely of teaching false doctrine by means of pictures designed for the purpose, is far worse, and that has been the fault of the Italians. Having received the traditions of sacred

art from the Greeks in much purity, they soon began to corrupt them ; and every step in the corruption of picture-doctrine prepared the way to a farther corruption ; and the traditions of sacred art became so much changed in the course of four centuries, that they no longer seemed to have sprung from the pure sources of ancient times. And this is more especially the case with the traditions respecting the Virgin Mary. There it is that mischievous imagination has been most busy, and there the fruits of unfaithfulness have been most abundantly produced. Painters have had too much licence in Italy and too much encouragement to paint their own inventions. The beautiful Churches which were built in the prosperous times of Italy were a spacious field for the lawful exercise of the painter's art ; but every Church became a temptation to the painter to distinguish himself by some audacious novelty.

Art has spent itself in Italy. There are neither patrons nor painters there any longer. Italian art came to maturity with wonderful rapidity and then fell into decrepitude. Sacred art, in the state to which Italian painters have brought it, is not worthy to be followed as a guide. Italian works of the brilliant period may serve as the best examples of drawing, of colouring, of composition, but not of doctrine. If Christian art is to exist in future times, the picture-doctrine of the last few centuries must be abandoned. And no choice will then be left but either to invent a new system of picture-doctrine, or else to have recourse to the best examples of antiquity, and to

restore as well as possible the old traditions of sacred art.

The safest way to promote Christian truth by means of painting is to return to the early and middle ages for ideas at least, and for a devout and careful treatment of the subjects which illustrate the doctrine and ritual of the Church. A process will be necessary for the restoration of sacred art after the corruption of it similar to that which was brought into use for the purification of the liturgy of the Church of England. The corrupt additions must be cut away while the sound part is preserved.

There are still sufficient remains of ancient art to serve as a rule for any new school of Christian art that may arise. The paintings of the catacombs are perhaps destined to exercise an influence on the art of the future. The works of the artists of the early and middle ages in Rome and in Palermo, though they can give no help in the manual part of the painter's labour, may do much to guide the mind and to form the ideas of a new school of art.

England cannot be said to have ever had a national school of sacred art. It is difficult to name an English artist who has painted for the Church. With the exception of the *Christ Rejected* of West, whose genius was not one of the most sublime, and the wild creations of Martin, who strove in vain after the grand and the tremendous, and a successful picture recently painted by Mr. Holman Hunt, there is hardly a work of sacred art which has been produced by an English pencil. And the works of

foreign masters which may be seen in England are not separated into classes, but they are placed in the same galleries together impartially and confusedly, sacred and profane, Tros Tyriusque, to be compared with each other as mere specimens of skill in the management of the pencil. Under these circumstances it is quite impossible that even the Ecce Homo of Correggio could make a due impression on the beholder.

There appears to be a growing desire among the English to see the fine arts brought once more into use in the embellishment of Churches. Something besides mural tablets and monuments erected to the memory of the departed, something that shall be done for the sake of the Church and not merely for the honour of private families, something that shall be expressive of Christian belief and at the same time more agreeable to the eye than the painted words of the Creed and the Commandments, seems to be required by the sentiment of the present age.

What sacred art there is at present in England is confined to the production of painted windows, and it is in the hands of those who profess to execute work in this branch of Church decoration. The painted window is an ornament which accords exceedingly well with pointed architecture, and it has become a sort of hobby with many whose ideas of sacred art go no farther. And it seems to be thought sufficient to seek for mediæval examples of glass-painting, and to reproduce as nearly as possible the style of the fourteenth century. But, though it may

be a safe rule in architecture to imitate with precision the early English or the decorated style, a simple revival of the ideas of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is not so safe in painting. Sometimes indeed modern taste invents designs for itself; and then the conventional colours are ignorantly changed, and ornaments unknown to antiquity are laid on thickly for the sake of introducing a spot of orange or green here and there. Sometimes our Lord is introduced in person as the Good Shepherd with the crook in His hand and a lamb on His shoulders, a mixture of the real and the allegorical of which there is no example in ancient works. Sometimes Angels are introduced into modern work celebrating the Nativity of Christ on instruments of music which were in use in the reign of King Edward III., a curious revival, which shows how much the taste of the day is limited to one period. Sometimes an Angel is seen in modern works kneeling before the Virgin at the Annunciation. If an example of an Angel kneeling should be found in an ancient window, it should be left to stand as an example of the art of the time; but on no account should a corrupt tradition be renewed in modern times.

And faults against the genuine traditions of sacred art appear in other things besides painted windows. We have been favoured with an effusion of poetry containing an address to "Israel's Sacred Lily," which is a manifest allusion to the famous lily so often put into the hand of Gabriel by Italian artists. And we have read reports of banners of the carefully-

chosen colours of blue and white, which seem to have been carried in procession on the Festivals of the Virgin in approbation of a corrupt tradition of the later Italian painters. All such obedience to bad traditions shows ignorance of real Christian art, or unwillingness to be guided by it.

An exhibition of ecclesiastical objects and of works of sacred art was opened recently in Rome. Many of these objects had already been exhibited in Paris. Some of them were beautiful; but there could be seen in the collection generally an unsteadiness of tradition, a variety of taste and manner, and an air of novelty and independence. The statues of the Virgin and Child, decorated for the most part with crowns and with dresses coloured after the fancy of the artist, were of all sorts and sizes, some small enough to stand on a mantelshelf, some large enough to fill a niche in a cathédral. In short, the works of sacred art then exhibited carried with them the conviction that they were goods in the market, specimens of work which might be done to order according to the taste of the customer. The artist was not there to instruct the people so much as to solicit the favour of patronage.

Sacred art without doubt will again have its place as a living power among the nations of the future. The Church-building nations will be the natural protectors and promoters of sacred art in future times. It is impossible to believe that the works of Greek and Italian art, produced during what we now call the middle ages, can have occupied all the ground

that was open to the career of the ecclesiastical painter. It is impossible to believe that sacred art is like a dead language, a thing to be studied by those only who are able to give their attention to the few examples of it which remain. The world has not yet seen the full development of sacred art. In England, wherever the growing population shall need new Churches, in America and in Australia, where Christianity endeavours to keep pace with the material prosperity of the land, in Russia, when its empty places shall be filled with a Christian population of the Greek Church, there will be scope for the labour of the Christian artist. Painting, with its sister arts, will certainly flourish to the glory of God in lands which have not yet been won to Christianity.

And as true doctrine is always the same, so the spirit in which that doctrine is represented in art will be the same, and the form will be nearly the same, though the styles of architecture and of Church decoration may differ. The traditions of art will accommodate themselves, as they have done before, to the traditions of architecture. As the same style of architecture will not suit every climate, so the varieties of architecture will afford scope for different kinds of architectural embellishment. In some climates the painted window, in others the painted wall, will be more appropriate. The roof must rise to an acute angle with steeply-sloping sides in regions where it will have to resist the pressure of a heavy weight of snow. And the windows must then be long and nar-

row, so that the walls may not be too delicate for the weight which will press on them. On the other hand, in hot regions, where snow is unknown, a flatter roof, with walls and windows to correspond, will be the natural form of the building. And there is a moral beauty in a building which is constructed with a regard to the exigencies of nature.

The decorations will adapt themselves to the light and the available spaces of the interior. In that respect something will be left to the decision of taste. But, when art interprets doctrine, there we do not require novelty of design, but faithfulness to ancient tradition and care in the reproduction of the old ideas. Christian art must be conscientious. Divine truth must be the light by which the Christian artist works. Zeal for the glory of God and charity towards the souls of men are qualifications full as necessary to the Christian artist's office as skill in the use of the pencil. Prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and vain-glory, where they enter, will ruin sacred art again, as they have ruined it in time past. The best sacred art is that which does not betray any secular motive, nor any influence of sect. While extravagance is checked, the whole truth must be exhibited without reserve; and he who is favourable to the idea of a Church decorated with painting must be prepared to accept nothing less than the truth, and nothing more. The Assunta, the Immacolata, and the Incoronata can have no place in the art of the future. The Virgin and Child are a beautiful subject for contemplation, but no living person must be seen

on the same canvass with them, and no local Saint must be lifted into notoriety by this mode of recommending him to the public. The Annunciation, that most important and beautiful of subjects, must keep its ground, but without the bended knee of the Angel. The Birth, the Death, and the Rising again of Christ are the chief parts of the Christian belief. It would be better to be content with whitewashed walls for ever than to admit such decorations as do not include the Annunciation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Art cannot be allowed to starve the religious mind with meagre fare. Art must honestly illustrate the Festivals in accordance with the Ritual of the Church. Art must be the willing handmaid of the Church; and a faithful Church is a perpetual witness to the great Christian mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement.



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